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5uu's
Raymond Strid
John Butcher
Roger Smith
Miklós Rózsa

free issue

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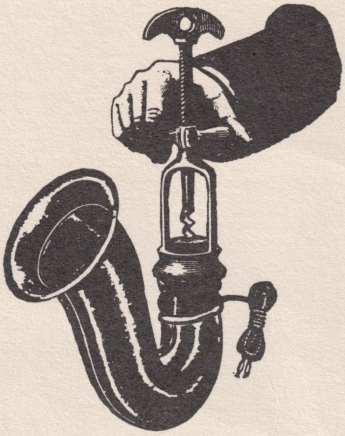

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Special Issue

Joe Harriott: Forgotten Father Of European Free Jazz

Edited by **Chris Blackford**

Essays by **Roger Cotterrell**
TE Martin, Chris Blackford
Jack Cooke and Joe Harriott

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VOX

Welcome to Issue 27. Solo improvisation is still an undervalued and misunderstood area of freely improvised music. The usual criticism levelled against it is that without the spontaneous creative input of other musicians, a solo improvisor short of inspiration is likely to resort to tried and trusted routines. While that may be true, one shouldn't forget that collective improvisation can also resort to routines; the old call and response, and the imitation/suggestion of another's gesture(s) are still familiar features of much group activity. So, I guess the 'pitfalls' are just about evenly distributed across both contexts. Of course, solo improv has much to offer that can't be conveyed in group playing; at best, a particular intimacy of expression that comes from the single 'voice', where the ideas and personality of the improvisor are conveyed in a direct, poignant, even vulnerable manner. Sadly, most soloists armed to the teeth with electronics and samplers have lost sight of this. John Butcher and Roger Smith, British improvisors who are among the most sensitive and original solo performers in Europe, consider the challenges of solo improvisation; Smith approaches his writing as though it were an improvisation. Finally, this issue introduces a film music section, beginning with one of the genre's masters — Miklós Rózsa.

Keep in touch!
Chris Blackford/June 1998

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995)

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"And that's my end, for man can wish no more,
Than so to write, as none e'er writ before."
Rochester (1647-1680)

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

90s 5uu's: **Sanjay Kumar, Bob Drake, David Kerman**

L.A. Experimental

5uu's are at the forefront of avant-rock with an exciting blend of feverish energy and textural complexity. **Chris Blackford** talks to **David Kerman**, their founder, principal composer and percussionist.

You formed the earliest version of the 5uu's in 1982 from members of the Los Angeles rock scene. Could you begin by describing the nature of this scene.

DK Prior to 1983 there was no network or 'scene' in Los Angeles which functioned to promote experimental music in a 'rock' sense. Groups who were deemed radical in previous years, such as Beefheart, Zappa, etc, actually had become well known because of major label interest. But when that interest failed in the 70s so did all sense of progression. Mostly at this point the majority of LA groups were hitched up to the new wave bandwagon, and the labels that were at one point willing to exploit the Dr Johns and Dan Hicks' were, by the early 80s, putting all their weight and finances behind the new wave to raise a lot of revenue.

Once in a great while a glimmer of hope would shine through this boorish mass of mediocrity. A band like Oingo Boingo who, in the early days played home-mades and sounded like The Residents playing Harry Partch, would get many of us excited about the new wave. But once the big Hollywood producers got the good bands in the big Hollywood studios, the outcome would be watered-down like a bad Martini into the same old formula, hit-making sound.

Truth be told, I got caught up in this mess we termed "Punk-Life". Curt Wilson, the original singer in the 5uu's, and myself had a new wave group in the late 70s. By day I was completely absorbed by the music of Art Bears, Univers Zero, This Heat, etc. Yet by night we were playing up and down the Sunset Strip supporting acts like The Missing Persons and The Motels. Beside the fact that we were getting nowhere fast, I disliked the music, the clothes and the make-up they forced me to wear. The whole scene was tawdry, but I didn't

yet know where or how else to play drums.

When and how did you begin to play experimental music?

DK By 1982 the scene in Los Angeles had become so dismal that I felt it was time to give up playing music in public. From time to time some friends and I would get together and do free improvs inspired by Henry Cow's 'Oslo' [see **Concerts**, 1974-75; CD reissue by ReR/Recommended] and Derek Bailey's Music Improvisation Company. This was the actual birth of 5uu's [the group took its name from gang graffiti sprayed on buildings in LA]. At this stage no one saw us play. We confined ourselves to one or anothers' basement with some crude recording gear and would just go at it for hours, editing down the outcome into something we ourselves could enjoy listening to. No one else in our little clique could understand why we had embraced such an extreme musical state; our good buddies would refer to this early period of 5uu's as "the sick" or "Five Yo Yo's". We felt we were alone in our musical tastes. As we were to find out later, in fact, we were not.

You mentioned that you were absorbed in the music of Art Bears and Univers Zero, groups that were part of the late 70s European alliance known as Rock In Opposition. Was anything comparable set up in LA among like-minded musicians.

DK Well, in little isolated pockets situated within LA there were others who shared our musical interests, though at the time we weren't aware of each other. By 1984 this was to change due to the persuasive nature of three California natives who took it upon themselves to try to unite some of these dispossessed entities. James Grigsby, a composer, Titus Levi, a college student, and Jim Norman, a nurse at a mental hospital, went about creating an LA scene outside of the mainstream. They called their little coalition COMA, the California Outside Music Association. They stood outside the doors of a Fred Frith concert at McCabe's guitar shop in Santa Monica, ranting and raving about the new scene which was just around the corner, handing out repugnant yellow flyers which damn near challenged anyone who thought they might possibly be an interesting musician to submit demo tapes to them for a possible inclusion into their organisation. I surmised that they were trying to be like RIO, which was an insult to my favourite institution, as well as an otiose endeavour in the "entertainment capitol of the world". What gall, I thought. What fools. Their voice would be like that of a flea fighting to be heard amid a stampede of elephants.

"COMA worked together and amazingly cohered into a semi-famous institution which was truly the motivating force behind the experimental and post-prog scene in Los Angeles in the 80s."

Nevertheless, a few months later myself and a handful of others were discussing a plan of action to bring our music into as many of California's mainstream sources as possible. We planned to have concerts in well known venues, radio shows aired by DJs with a penchant for the subversive, and an internationally distributed compilation LP which would feature one track from each of the 10 groups which made up the organisation.

Others had tried their hand at having an affect in the past, but ultimately failed. The Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS) barely had wind in its sails when it sank, yet somehow managed to leave its legacy in the form a 10-zillion CD box-set for musical archeologists to unearth; and there was an ICA, not unlike the one in London, whose guys were constantly bickering and competing with one another for grant money.

By comparison, COMA worked together and amazingly cohered into a semi-famous institution which was truly the motivating force behind the experimental and post-prog scene in Los Angeles in the 80s. The concerts happened, the radio specials were aired, the album was released and fortunately people listened. The organisation lasted for a decade and in its heyday played host to music festivals in the business district of Long

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HAPPY FAMILY "Tosco"
(Cuneiform Rune 93)
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Beach, California. Sometimes there were 30 performances per day with as many as five acts playing simultaneously in different venues. The city council actually helped to fund these events. Titus had convinced them that outside-jazz and avant-rock were hip, cool and *cultural*. These endeavours were successful. The musicians were paid, the business owners made out like bandits, the city increased its revenue and, most importantly, many hundreds of people had their musical horizons broadened, proving to me personally something that I have always suspected — that if more people could be introduced to this sort of music, more people would like it.

back in the mid-80s

The 5uu's debut, ***Bel Marduk & Tiamat*** *(1984), on your own U:r Records label, still sounds interestingly unconventional — a strange and successful blend of the innovative and the familiar. While the group's sound is often forbidding in its dissonant use of keyboards and your heavily accentuated, unpredictable drumming, the song lyrics with their Babylonian cosmology theme suggest an orientation towards the late 60s/early 70s UK progressive rock notion of the 'concept album'.*

DK Some people did indeed consider it a concept album, though I've always imagined it to be a 'cycle of songs'. These little ditties came to be in 1984 and 85 when the group made the decision to stop improvising and to actually come up with some composed material. In the long run, no one else offered any material, so I ended up writing it and the others threw in a few cents worth of ideas. When coming about with these songs, which were literally the first things I was ever to write, I imagined that there should be an underlying, repeated musical theme as well as a unifying commonality in the lyrical content. In many ways 5uu's music still clings to this formula. In this early process I came upon the makings of my compositional trademark and style.

The words were usually written in the first-person and dealt with the unlikely 'birth' of intangible things; thus their commonality, or concept if one insists. This was difficult to do as a first-time writer. It would have been easier to rationalise about things one could grasp — a coin, a candle, a painting — but for me, at least, it was more challenging to use as subject matter elements which are not tangible, and I mean this in a figurative way as well as a literal one. The epic of creation is a difficult enough concept in itself as there is much more to it than gods and dragons and primordial oozes. Much of it, as a point of apocryphal thought, holds water today, and I tried to use this sense of modernism as a vehicle to express what could barely be said in words, let alone set in stone. For all its flaws, and for its accomplishments, I'm still quite proud of the effort. It laid the groundwork for all 5uu's music to come.

Then for the ***Elements*** *(1986) album 5uu's teamed up*

with Motor Totemist Guild. This expanded line-up seems to me to take on more complex arrangements, where the earlier avant-rock songform is integrated with an avant-garde chamber aesthetic which makes good use of the additional woodwinds, vibes and cello, etc. What was the thinking behind this collaboration?

DK During our stint in COMA, the aforementioned James Edward Grigsby and myself became good pals and business associates at his record label, Rotary Totem. We spent a lot of time together working like dogs to make something worthwhile out of the label and to promote and produce our own music. The music side pretty much fell into place. He asked me for some lyrics, I offered him 'Imperfections' and he did a beautiful job of setting it to music. It became our first official collaboration, which then appeared on both the next Motor Totemist Guild **[Shapuno Zoo]** and 5uu's **[Elements]** albums. Interestingly, the MTG version sounds closer to 5uu's stylistically, and vice versa. Plus, all the musicians were beginning to be like one big, happy incestuous family. Both groups were writing music for the other to play and also using the same studio. Similarities were beginning to overshadow differences. While others took a well earned break, James Grigsby and Emily Hay from MTG, and Sanjay Kumar and myself from 5uu's, continued to work, conjugating the two group names into U Totem. Later, Eric Johnson became a full-time member.

What opportunities did this new alliance present you as a composer.

DK This was not an especially fruitful time for me as a composer. I wrote very little for U Totem in the five years the band was together. Mostly I was writing the lyrics and the melodies to go with them, and arguing with James over production aesthetics. These things usually ironed themselves out. Yet a change was to ensue near the end period of recording the CD **U Totem**. I was also playing with Thinking Plague in Colorado and had enlisted their bassist Bob Drake to engineer U Totem. I was getting antsy to write a new type of music which involved Bob and was generally influenced by Thinking Plague, with a greater penchant for the energy and volume experienced when playing 'rock' music, as opposed to highly complex notations and classically inspired chamber aesthetics. Once written, this new music was considered for U Totem, but after closer inspection proved to be ideal for the next phase of 5uu's.

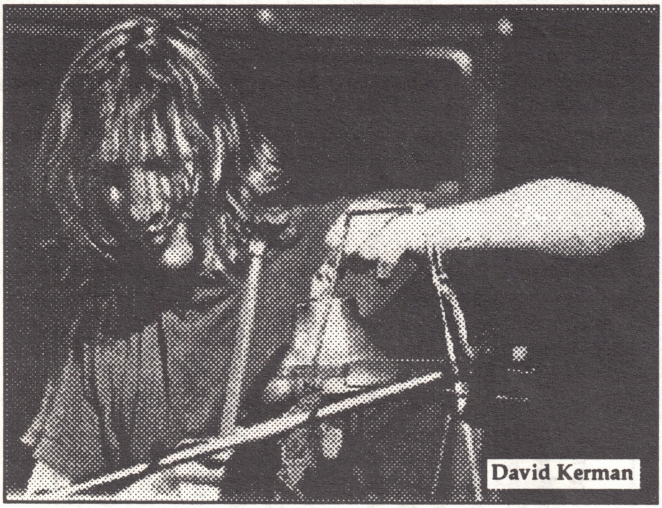
"Cymbals were swinging around on ropes, we threw little bells at the walls, beat the hell out of metal tables, smashed glass, screamed at the top of our lungs, and then left Bob with the task of making something sonically pristine out of this unbridled energy."

This new phase saw a new trio line-up of Sanjay Kumar, Bob Drake and yourself, plus contributions from Thomas Dimuzio and others, which emerged in the early 90s to record the remarkable ***Hunger's Teeth*** *(1994). Here, I think, 5uu's music reaches a new level of complexity and intrigue where there seems to be more emphasis on sound design created in the studio. One of the most exciting features of the album is how the real-time playing and the studio manipulations cohere. While the music is often dense, it never sounds bloated. You manage to achieve a thrilling sense of movement and development in these pieces. Perhaps you could talk about this phase of the group's evolution.*

DK This was a very wild period for us musically in the studio. These songs were not performed live for the four years it took us to record and release the CD. In fact, 5uu's have not performed in America in over 10 years. We knew what we were brewing up was going to be mighty. We wanted a sound somewhere between RIO and Grand Funk Railroad, and I vividly remember that to do this it was necessary to 'unlearn' much of the musical processing which had been instilled in me in previous years.

Caution was thrown to the wind in every respect. We always made a complete mess of the

studio. Cymbals were swinging around on ropes, we threw little bells at the walls, beat the hell out of metal tables, smashed glass, screamed at the top of our lungs, and then left Bob with the task of making something sonically pristine out of this unbridled energy. There were sensitive moments from time to time, my favourite being the aerosol can of air freshener which sounds like white noise on 'Roan', but the main feel was angst. We were hyenas in the studio, more like the Three Stooges than the 5uu's.


David Kerman

We had an hilarious session when the three of us decided to audition for the lead vocal spot. Sanjay was deplorable, just hideous, and we could barely keep from laughing hysterically. I was even worse. Bob and Sanjay had to duck down behind the mixing console to keep me from seeing through the studio glass that they were rolling on the ground laughing. However, Bob could carry a tune, follow a melody and basically sing like an angel. He was drafted outright, though at times I think he wished we'd considered someone else.

One of our guests was Thom Dimuzio our computer-wizard friend, who had supplied us with tapes of many sound effects which we proceeded to mix into the final takes to add even more dramatic tension and a strange aural space. Thom is a brilliant electroacoustic musician and software designer, who is consistently at the vanguard of American new music. He is the Pierre Schaeffer of the next millennium.

This was the most successful 5uu's project to date, and the attention it received made possible the move to France, the tours and the motivation for the next set of songs.

Your latest album ***Crisis In Clay*** *(1997) is another very impressive work, building on the achievements of* ***Hunger's Teeth****. Again there's a superb integration of the played and studio-manipulated elements, and Thomas Dimuzio's greater involvement brings more electro-acoustic elements. It's refreshing to hear Bob Drake's treated vocals again imaginatively embedded in the mix, so that the voice(s) and instruments appear as equals in the overall sound design. There's rarely the sense of a lead vocalist performing over an accompaniment in the traditional manner of songform. In fact, experimental songwriting is an area that seems to have fallen into neglect during the 90s, making the 5uu's work in this field all the more important. Could you talk about your enduring commitment to lyric writing and songwriting, and about the strategies you've employed in order to extend the notion of song structure.*

DK I'm not sure that the word 'commitment' has ever entered into the picture. It's more like a musical addiction. I've enjoyed writing songs for so long that I wouldn't know what to do with my creative side if I were to stop. The songs usually begin with the lyrical content, and my only commitment to the material is to bring it to a listenable state so that others might enjoy listening to it as well.

To me a song should have a point to make both lyrically and musically. As a drummer, I prefer songs that have an interesting or complex rhythmic scheme. As an appreciator of studio work, I prefer songs that have a beautifully thought out sonic style. As a composer I like to hear somewhat angular or off-kilter melody lines.

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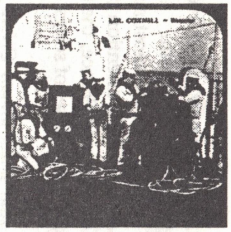

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When you come upon a collection of these great accomplishments, be they as long-winded as **Trout Mask Replica** [Captain Beefheart] or as short as **The World As It Is Today** [Art Bears], then you have a classic. And since I've yet to come up with a true classic by this my own definition, I find it very nice and generous of you to allude to the fact that my music extends the notion of song structure, but honestly I don't feel that this is the case.

In Britain, I've noticed a steady decline in the number of musicians experimenting with rock in the RIO and earlier 70s progressive rock traditions, doubtless frightened off by a generation of vitriolic punk critics. Beyond the projects led by former Henry Cow members and other long-serving mavericks like Robert Wyatt, Peter Hammill, King Crimson and Charles Hayward, there's little that one could identify as a younger generation of rock experimentalists. Are there signs of younger US musicians taking up the challenges of the aforementioned traditions?

DK I haven't noticed too many new younger groups who follow in the wake of the Recommended Records tradition. Nothing which might be thought of as a third-wave has arisen. I don't rule out the possibility of one coming about in the near future. Young people tend to be idealistic and that can be a great motivator when the quest for musical adventure comes into play. They most likely won't get much help from the American media, though. I'm not certain about this, but it seems logical that the powers-that-be are not aware of RIO bands, or the *ReR Quarterly*, being as that type of company is hardly heard of here. People with adventurous tastes usually seek this kind of thing out and finally feel like they've found a musical home once they become involved.

Bands such as Biota, Thinking Plague, Non Credo, talented groups in their own right with upbringings as American as the air they breathe and the food they eat, usually have their thirsts for attention quenched by European sources. It's not the media's fault that they haven't had the chance to make any money pushing this type of music, and it's not the fault of the proggy-prog listener who would rather pick up Steve Hackett's mix of **The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway** than take a chance on the latest Dunaj or Shaking Ray Levis CD. Maybe in the future some high-spirited and committed loonies will adopt a crude and desperate philosophy not unlike the original COMA crew and think — since America has no scene we will go about making one. If they were to be so idealistic, they'd probably share my opinion that if more people were introduced to this music, more people would like it. **R**

Photos courtesy of **David Kerman**

RELEVANT RECORDINGS

5UU'S
Hunger's Teeth (RéR 5uu1, 1994 CD); **Point Of Views** (Cuneiform Rune 85, 1996 CD) contains selections from out of print LPs **Bel Marduk & Tiamat** (1984), **Elements** (1986), plus 7" single **Bar Code** and the track 'Carousel Of Progress' from *ReR Quarterly* Vol 3 #3; **Crisis In Clay** (RéR 5uu2, 1997 CD)

U TOTEM
U Totem (Cuneiform Rune 24, 1990 CD)
Strange Attractors (Cuneiform Rune 66, 1994 CD)

MOTOR TOTEMIST GUILD (w David Kerman)
Archive One (No Man's Land nml/MTG 1, 1996 CD) contains selections from out of print LP **Infra Dig** (1984) and the entire LP **Contact With Veils** (1986); **Archive Two** (No Man's Land nml/MTG 2, 1996 CD) contains selections from out of print LPs **Klang** (1985), **Shapuno Zoo** (1988), **A Luigi Futi** (1989)

BOB DRAKE
Thinking Plague, **In This Life** (RéR tpCD1, 1989 CD); Hail, **Turn Of The Screw** (RéR HCD1 CD); Hail, **Kirk** (RéR HCD2 CD); Bob Drake, **Little Black Train** (Crumbling Tomes Archive CTA 6, 1996 CD)

BLAST (w David Kerman)
Stringy Rugs (Cuneiform Rune 95, 1997 CD)

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free-forum

Joe Harriott...

FREEDOM IN THE AIR
Items arising from Joe Harriott: Forgotten Father Of European Free Jazz (Rubberneck 25).

It is obvious that freedom was in the air in the late 1950s. Not only were Ornette Coleman and Joe Harriott investigating it in Los Angeles and London respectively, but Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor were also working on it in Chicago and New York (Sun Ra, incidentally, was into modal jazz some time before Miles Davis). There were also several examples of jazz musicians, who normally stuck to the changes, making forays into freedom. The earliest examples of this on record were the 1949 Lennie Tristano efforts, but these were followed in the early 1950s by those of Jimmy Giuffre, and there was a 1955 free improvisation called 'Free Form' (no less) on the first Chico Hamilton Quintet disc (now on Mosaic box set 175). Even composers like Earle Brown, Lucas Foss and Karlheinz Stockhausen were getting interested in improvisation.

In addition, there are at least two recorded sets of totally free improvisation dating from 1960 which historically leap frog everybody else, even if the results are not brilliant. One features the mainly visual artist Jean Dubuffet creating overdubbed improvisations on a large variety of instruments and non-instruments — none of which he was conventionally proficient on (These were available on an LP called **Musical Experiences** on Finnadar SR 9002). The other set is by the six-piece Group Ongaku organised by Kosugi Takehisa (recently issued on Hear Sound Art Library CD 002). Their home recordings feature a lot of use of live electronics and pre-recorded material, making it sound like today's sampler merchants, although the main influence was John Cage's cut-up tape pieces. Their concert recordings mainly feature conventional musical instruments, and are amazing for how far out they sound for 1960. For instance, the saxophone work often anticipates Anthony Braxton or John Zorn!

It is difficult to say how much influence Harriott's free form music had. I am inclined to say not very much, especially as Coleman had so much more exposure and was (arguably) more successful musically. Perhaps the most direct influence was on other members of the London modern jazz fraternity who did venture into freedom, such as Stan Tracey and Bobby Wellins. I remember an early 1960s set by an ad hoc Tracey quartet (probably with Dave Goldberg guitar, Malcolm Cecil bass and Ronnie Stephenson drums) at Ronnie Scott's Club that included a free improvisation as well as the 'normal' jazz performances. Tracey was also a member of the New Departures Quartet that had 'Culloden Moor', a Wellins composition involving free playing in its repertoire; this can be heard on their 1964 recording, now on Hothouse HH CD 1010, which otherwise features their distinctive version of jazz on the changes.

By the mid-1960s, several younger musicians were playing free jazz in London, notably those in the Mike Westbrook Band (then the main repository of free jazz players in London), the Chris McGregor Blue Notes (who had just arrived from South Africa) and the Trevor Watts/Paul Rutherford Quintet (which became the Spontaneous Music Ensemble at the start of 1966). There were also at least two outfits concentrating on free improvisation, namely AMM and The People Band. These younger musicians would have been aware of Harriott's free

music, and were perhaps influenced by its spirit, but the main influences came from across the Atlantic.

Harriott's free music, AMM and the SME can all be described as 'group music' in that they all put the group before the individual. However, the methodologies and end results were so different from each other, that it seems meaningless to try and lump them together. They were all very original — each inventing its own brand of group music. John Stevens did hear the Harriott Quintet live and on record, since he was a great Phil Seamen fan. However, he was not enamoured with their free music, even though he was into Coleman's as soon as he heard it. The main influences on the SME approach, apart from some aspects of Coleman's music, would seem to have been the trio of Jimmy Giuffre, Paul Bley & Steve Swallow, the trio of Albert Ayler, Gary Peacock and Sunny Murray, the compositions of Anton Webern, and certain traditional musics from Africa and Asia.

There are tapes of the group Joseph Holbrooke made at rehearsals. I have heard two 1965 performances based on modal pieces by John Coltrane: the sound quality is very poor, and the guitarist sounds more like a jazz guitarist than a Derek Bailey! I caught this trio at the Little Theatre Club late 1966, when they were playing free improvisations framed by written material. Unfortunately, I was not ready for them then, nor for the SME that was playing opposite.

Nearly all of Joe Harriott's recordings, including **Free Form**, were made for Denis Preston's Lansdowne label. Lansdowne never actually issued recordings themselves — instead they licensed them to other labels. Most were put out by EMI in Britain, but a few were released in America by Capitol or Jazzland. All of these are now owned by Polygram who do not seem interested in either issuing or licensing them (Hat Hut approached them unsuccessfully a few years ago). What is the point of this, except to suppress and censure them? If they do not want to do anything with them, Polygram should give them away. They would benefit by tying up less storage space, and the rest of the world would benefit by having access to this wonderful music. **R**

Martin Davidson

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A certain Togetherness

Declan O'Driscoll talks to Swedish percussionist **Raymond Strid** who, during the 90s, has emerged as one of the most sensitive and original performers in improvised music.

photo: Declan O'Driscoll

Swedish percussionist Raymond Strid has, in recent years, become an important member of the improvising community, working with, among others, Barry Guy, Roger Turner, Evan Parker, John Butcher, Mats Gustafsson, Sten Sandell and Marilyn Crispell. The most notable aspect of his playing is an ability to clarify the essence of the music as it develops, creating a sense of space with great subtlety within the most complex of settings, often holding back where another might blur the details. These qualities are also evident in his playing when he substitutes his drum kit for "table percussion" and amplified and processed instruments and objects; for example, on the album **Gushwachs** with Gustafsson, Sandell and Philipp Wachsmann.

We spoke in the café of Books Upstairs in Sligo where, as part of this Irish town's Contemporary Music Festival, he played in a trio with Mats Gustafsson and Barry Guy.

You might begin by telling me about the improvised music scene in Sweden. Are there many people involved?

RS Since the early 90s there are some musicians, not very many. Most are based in Stockholm. I don't know why, but Stockholm has a history of free improvised music. One of the oldest groups, Lokomotiv Konkret, has been going for 20 years now. They are more into the field of energy free jazz music. But there are now younger musicians who show an interest in improvised music. I feel very positive about this because I am already playing with these younger musicians.

Is there an audience for the music?

RS It depends on which place you are playing. There is a very young audience coming up now. I wouldn't have said that five years ago, but I think many of these things happen in waves. It's not like a fashion but I think they are getting tired of very conventional music, and then they hear improvised music and they get interested. It's not a big audience but, for instance, if Gush [Strid, Sandell and Gustafsson] play at the jazz club Fasching in Stockholm, five years ago we would have had maybe 40 to 60 in the audience, now we have probably 80 to 150. That's the new interest.

How did your own interest begin?

RS I had an interest in music generally when I was a teenager, and I started to listen to jazz and classical music when I was 14 years old.

Through the influence of your parents?

RS No, through my own interest. I thought jazz was very boring, but because other people liked it I thought I should also like it. So I forced myself to listen to some on records over and over again, and then after two days it hit me. After that I was very much into jazz. I sometimes skipped school and stayed home to listen for eight hours or more without breaks. I remember once I was literally vomiting because I was so exhausted. So after that I thought: "If you are going to do this you have to go further." So I decided that I had to start to play music. Already at that time I had been listening to the free improvised music from Germany and England. When I was about 17 or 18, I was familiar with the work of Evan Parker and Peter Brötzmann.

"So I forced myself to listen to some on records over and over again, and then after two days it hit me. After that I was very much into jazz. I sometimes skipped school and stayed home to listen for eight hours or more without breaks. I remember once I was literally vomiting because I was so exhausted."

Did you have easy access to their recordings?

RS Yes, there was a jazz magazine and a guy there who reviewed those records from the early 70s, and I bought them because of that. There was one shop in Stockholm where a guy was selling records from Incus and FMP. From that point I started to play. I had played guitar before but my pitch was bad. In fact, I still can't pitch a melody. So I thought drums would be easier. I started to play drums seriously when I was 21, and I was only interested in playing free improvised music, so I never learned how to play rock or jazz. But I had some classical percussion training at school, so I've got some basic technique.

Some free players argue that technique is not essential. Do you think it is necessary?

RS I believe it is. You need the technique for what you are going to do. You don't have to be able to play everything technically, you only need it for what you want to do.

So having started to drum I presume you began to meet and play with other musicians?

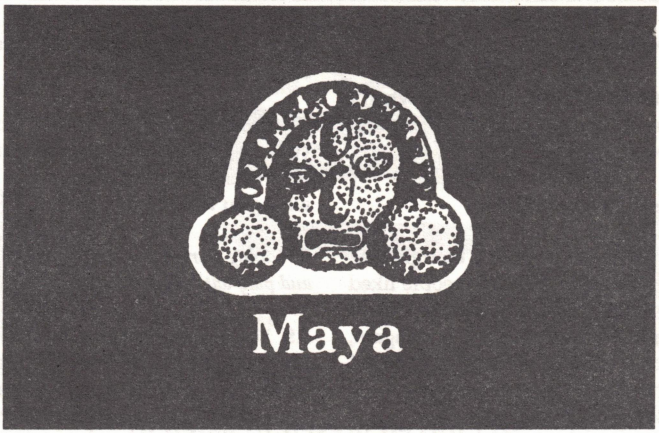
RS Yes, and it didn't sound very good. This was 1977, when I was 21. We were playing something like American free jazz but not very well.

You and the musicians had to feel yourselves into a new area of music?

RS Yes, it took a lot of time to work. This music now has a long tradition, but at that time we didn't have that, and we were not able to collaborate with those experienced musicians from England or Germany. It's different for people now, but I think I'm probably very slow. For me it started to happen 10 years ago when the music came to a point where I could feel that I had control over my instrument, and I could have ambitions and begin to achieve those ambitions. I was interested in listening to different drummers and to how they did things. When I knew how they did them, I could relax and start to try to do my own things. I reached that point maybe only four or five years ago.

How did you meet Mats Gustafsson and Sten Sandell and begin to play as Gush?

RS It happened in 1987. I had a project in a factory building. I did a piece called 'Three Days At The Factory'. We had 15 musicians and it was three floors and six rooms. I made up this game where you used the dice and then you had to



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Mats Gustafsson, Barry Guy, Raymond Strid

change positions, and musicians had to move on to another room. I was given Mats Gustafsson's name by someone there and I called him up and asked him if he wanted to join in. That was the start of our work together. Later we met up with Sten Sandell and formed the band Gush in 1988.

When you're playing, what is the most important aspect of the music for you?

RS I think it's the communication. You feel a certain togetherness. It could also be that I'm playing against someone, but you can feel that everyone has the right sound together. The sound is very important. If you go in with a group like Gustafsson/Guy/Strid or Gush you get the sound, you have a definite group sound. But if you're playing with new musicians it takes time to get the common sound together.

Some musicians like the first improvised encounter more than any other. Do you prefer when you know the musicians for some time?

RS No, no. It's not a contradiction for me. It's the two things, and I prefer both! **R**

Raymond Strid's new CD is ***Live At Fasching*** *(Dragon DRCD 313) with Gush (Mats Gustafsson, saxophones & fluteophone; Sten Sandell, piano & voice). Dragon Records, Box 4068, 102 62 Stockholm, Sweden.*

DISCOGRAPHY

Gush, **From Things To Sounds...** (Dragon DRCD 204 CD); Gush with Sven-Ake Johansson, **Tjo Och Tjim** (Dragon DRLP 192); Gush, **Live At Fasching** (Dragon DRCD 313 CD) Gush with Philipp Wachsmann, **Gushwachs** (Bead 002 CD); w Paul Pignon, **Far From Equilibrium** (Alice In The Air ALCD 013 CD); w Marilyn Crispell & Anders Jormin, **Spring Tour** (Alice In The Air ALCD 007 CD); w Marilyn Crispell, Barry Guy & Mats Gustafsson, **Gryff Gryff Gryffs** (Music & Arts 1003 CD); w Barry Guy & Mats Gustafsson, **You Forget To Answer** (Maya MCD 9601 CD)

Video phile

Dementia 13 (aka **The Haunted And The Hunted**) (1963)
Dir. Francis Coppola
with William Campbell, Luana Anders, Bart Patton, Mary Mitchell, Patrick Magee
Screen Multimedia REEL 2209
74 mins, Black & White

Although director Roger Corman is regarded by many as a B-movie hack with nothing but dreck and kitsch in his repertoire, he's been responsible for giving tuition and support to some of modern American cinema's finest talents: Peter Bogdanovich, Joe Dante, Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro and Paul Bartel. Francis Ford Coppola (minus the 'Ford') first worked for Corman by translating his Russian film purchases into English, even though he didn't understand Russian. The success of one of these films enabled Corman to give Coppola $20,000 to make his first film, **Dementia 13**.

It's not a particularly 'good' film by most lights — the acting is mostly wooden, the plot is silly and the dialogue is weak — but the mood and atmosphere transcend the technical failings to give us a glimpse of Coppola's potential for off-kilter strangeness that would come to fruition in elements of **Apocalypse Now** (1979). **Dementia 13** has a dream-like quality similar to Dreyer's **Vampyr** (1931) and Robert Wise's **The Haunting** (also 1963). The setting, an Irish castle, appears at times to have been painted by the surrealist De Chirico, while the opening scenes in a rowboat seem to have been filmed in the depths of space. A stunning title sequence, showing a series of cross-faded paintings of drowning people and surreal scenery, makes it one of the finest in low budget cinema. Influenced by **Psycho** in its use of aloof and strong blonde actresses (the weirdly attractive Luana Anders is superb as a manipulating gold-digger), and in certain plot devices that I can't divulge for fear of spoiling a potential viewer's enjoyment, **Dementia 13** is very much a B-movie, yet offers a clue to the direction Coppola might have taken. A dip in the weird pool.
Jim Barker

The Tango Lesson (1997)
Dir. Sally Potter
with Sally Potter, Pablo Veron
Artificial Eye ART 151
97 mins, Black & White/Colour

Sally Potter's **The Tango Lesson** is a different kind of love story, using the interesting device of having two main leads, Potter and Pablo Veron, an internationally acclaimed dancer, playing themselves in a fictional context. This sets up a strange tension; while Potter is a key player in the drama, her aloof and 'unactorly' screen presence (the distinction between her 'real' self and screen character deliberately blurred), together with the knowledge that she's the film's director, has an unsettling affect on the narrative, resulting in romantic exchanges which appear staged and dramatically unconvincing. Perhaps what we are witnessing is a form of dramatic therapy where Potter-director explores her own fantasies.

Structuring the narrative around Sally's (Potter) attempts to learn the tango from Pablo (Veron) an Argentinian dancer, the film is divided into a series of lessons, taking us through the characters' emotional struggles and conflicts rather than merely dance steps or routines. For Potter, the crux of learning the dance is an emotional and intellectual struggle over whether to hand over the power to lead and direct which forms a fundamental part of her own work/life. In this respect, it's also an analysis of gender relations. Towards the end, when roles are reversed and Pablo becomes a potential actor in the screenplay Potter is working on, we see the couple renegotiating their relationship and evaluating the compromises required to work together.

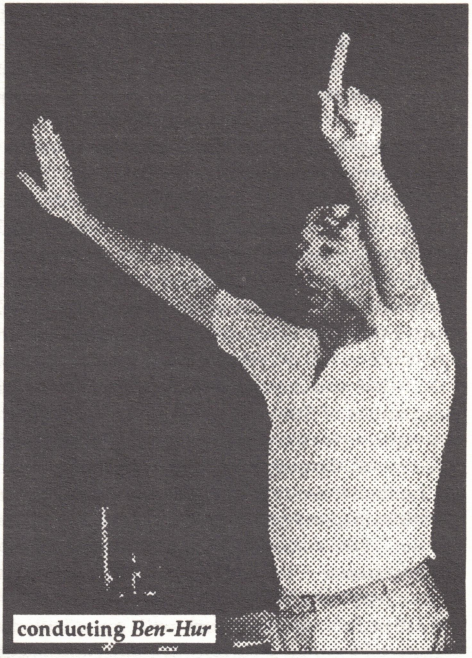
The film's at its most visually stimulating and light hearted when the romantic exchanges errupt, in the well worn tradition of musicals, into fully fledged dance routines where the lovers dance to a seductive score of tangos in the cobbled streets of Buenos Aires and by lamplit river in Paris. Given her ease and elegance dancing the tango, it shouldn't surprise you to learn that in 'real life' Potter trained as a dancer/choreographer at the London School Of Contemporary Dance in the 1970s. **R**
Catherine Blackford

film score

Passion and Discipline

Chris Blackford investigates the double life of **Miklós Rózsa**

Hungarian born Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995) was one of that rare breed of composers who established an international reputation in both concert hall and cinema; his insightful and entertaining autobiography is aptly titled **Double Life** (The Baton Press, 1982). In 1940 he emigrated to America, via Paris and London, becoming an American citizen in 1945. During the last few years of his life he was fortunate to see a renewed interest in his music, with many important concert compositions and film scores reissued or rerecorded for CD release. Although the following CD reviews are principally concerned with his film music, occasional reference is made to his equally important concert works where, he once said, "my musical heart truly lived." Nevertheless, Rózsa was a dedicated film composer, who composed 90 scores (1937-81), who detested the superficial classical pastiches of numerous Hollywood composers he called "tame studio hacks". Like Erich Wolfgang Korngold before him, Rózsa brought a formal sophistication to Hollywood film music based on a rigorous conservatory training; he had gained a doctorate in musicology at Leipzig Conservatory in the late 1920s. Moreover, some of his film scores were created after intensive preparatory research into various ancient and traditional musics. Although an "unashamed champion of tonality", he pushed tonality to its limits, sometimes exploring polytonality. His rich orchestral palette conveys a passionate, often dark and dissonant, romanticism with a range and intensity of emotional expression equalled by few other film composers.



conducting *Ben-Hur*

Magyar moods

The Complete Music For Solo Violin (Koch International Classics 3-7256-2 H1, 1995) Like Bartók and Kódaly, Rózsa was an avid collector and transcriber of Hungarian, Magyar peasant folksongs. A childhood love for this music would become the central influence on his subsequent musical development. This disc includes two early compositions from 1929 that draw on this heritage. *Variations On A Hungarian Peasant Song*, Op 4, features violinist Isabella Lippi, accompanied by pianist John Novacek, performing with great verve, superbly conveying the many dramatic contrasts in mood and tempo — from spiky fervour to high-pitch, wistful melancholy.

While *North Hungarian Peasant Songs And Dances*, Op 5, lacks the uninhibited energy of *Variations*, it signals Rózsa's developing structural refinement and passionate, romantic sensibility. As the only occasions where he used authentic Hungarian folk material, they make an essential point of departure for newcomers.

Theme, Variations And Finale, Op 13A, was written in 1933, revised in 1943. Its November 1943 performance in New York conducted at very short notice and without rehearsal by a young Leonard Bernstein, brought him and Rózsa international critical acclaim. While essentially Hungarian in spirit, there are echoes of Ravel in the radiant woodwind and string textures of variation II, and suggestions of Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* in the vigorous writing for brass in variations III and V. However, the gorgeous, sweeping arrangements of the theme are typical Rózsa; the grandeur of variation IV presages his epic historical film scores of the 1950s. Also featured on this disc (Koch International Classics 3-7191-2H1, 1993) is *Three Hungarian Sketches*, Op 14 (1938), another evocative folk-inspired work with a particularly sensitive Pastorale section. Stirring performances by The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra under James Sedares.

dark side of the movies

Double Indemnity/The Killers/Lost Weekend (Koch International Classics 3-7375-2-H1, 1997) Rózsa described his "first period" of film scores as "Oriental" because of the exotic locations in *The Four Feathers* (1939), *The Thief Of Baghdad* (1940) and *The Jungle Book* (1942). His "second period" of "psychological" films began with Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) for which he won an Oscar, quickly followed by Billy Wilder's memorable depiction of a desperate alcoholic (Ray Milland) in *Lost Weekend* (1945). Rózsa's film music here assumes a suitably darker, tragic hue while interpreting this obsessive, disintegrating personality. The string scoring is magnificent, even lyrical passages are tinged with anguish; the brass explodes in dissonant clusters and a theremin, used sparingly, creates a chilling poignancy for scenes of delirium tremens (Rózsa had introduced this outlandish instrument to Hollywood in the aforementioned *Spellbound*).

Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), a classic *film noir* with ruthless Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck immersed in insurance fraud and murder, brings another atmospheric score from Rózsa. Its edgy, tremolo strings figure resembles a motif later employed by Bernard Herrmann in *Psycho* (the two composers were the best of friends). Rózsa heightens the film's sordid, pessimistic mood with low woodwinds and brass, swathed in dark clouds of brooding strings.

"...I have always been opposed to the idea of music merely duplicating what is being shown on the screen. In my view the music should add a new dimension, should tell the audience something it can't be told in any other way."
Miklós Rózsa, *Double Life*

According to Rózsa, *The Killers* (1946) — by producer Mark Hellinger and director Robert Siodmak — ushered in his "third period", tailored to suit the violent exploits of an urban criminal underworld. Burt Lancaster is the promising boxer gone bad, crazy about a duplicitous Ava Gardner. 'Prison Stars', however, finds a melancholy romanticism between the sharp, percussive rhythms of the 'Main Title' and the boogie-influenced 'Exit The Killers', which recalls the strident, polyrhythmic jazz of Copland's *Piano Concerto* (1926). James Sedares conducts the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in these superb new recordings. Excellent sleevenotes, too.

Another cue from *The Killers* appears on **Lust For Life Suite/Background To Violence Suite** (Varèse Sarabande VSD-5405, 1993). A memorial to producer Hellinger, Rózsa assembled several excerpts from *The Killers*, *Brute Force* (1947) and *The Naked City* (1948) to form **Background To Violence**

Suite; three films that share a common theme of explicit (for the time) gangster violence. Especially impressive are the militaristic ostinati, searing strings and punchy brass of 'Prelude To A Murder', sharply contrasted with the eerie nostalgia of 'Nocturno' and the moving thematic climax to 'Epilogue'.

Rózsa used Debussyian impressionism as a stylistic reference point for Vincent Minnelli's *Lust For Life* (1956), a bio-pic of Vincent Van Gogh (Kirk Douglas). After 'Prelude' and its soaring theme, the following four cues establish an expansive pastoralism alive with vibrant colours and skittish episodes. As Van Gogh's mental condition deteriorates, so 'Madness' plunges us into a *noir*-like soundworld of shrill woodwinds, whirlwind strings and tempestuous brass. 'Finale' is classic Rózsa — huge theme, triumphant, yet shot through with a tragic beauty. The composer conducts these digitally enhanced 1958-9 stereo recordings.

age of epics

Ivanhoe (Intrada MAF 7055D, 1994) Rózsa's "fourth period", his "Historico-Biblical" scores for MGM's epics, begins with the Roman *Quo Vadis* (1951). A year later it's the Age of Chivalry for Oscar nominated *Ivanhoe* (1952), where 12th century French troubadours, Latin hymns, medieval Jewish music, even a ballad by Richard the Lionheart, provide thematic inspiration. Never merely *faux* medievalism, Rózsa's subtle blending of these elements within his own passionate style ensures an harmonically rich work, admirably performed by the Sinfonia of London conducted by Bruce Broughton. The tender lyricism of 'Rebecca's Love' is outstanding, but the most arresting music is reserved for the two battle cues ('The Battlement' and 'Saxon Victory') where competing polytonal lines and polyrhythmic energy achieve an exhilarating intensity which is reminiscent of Ives' symphonic work.

Bruce Broughton and the Sinfonia of London are back in action for Joseph L Mankiewicz's 1953 Shakespearean epic **Julius Caesar** (Intrada MAF 7056D, 1995), like *Ivanhoe* newly reconstructed (to the satisfaction of Rózsa) by Daniel Robbins. Happily, the composer's original 'Overture' has been reinstated, having been ditched by "High Command at MGM" for a piece by Tchaikovsky. More alarming excisions, now heard for the first time, were 'Brutus' Soliloquy' and 'Brutus' Secret' which form a vital part of the brooding heart of the score — their sombre strings rife with conspiracy and treachery. Elsewhere, striking fanfares and stately processionals announce the splendour of Caesar's rule. A wonderfully paced 'Caesar Now Be Still!', sensitively interweaves those majestic and tragic elements of the principals' themes producing a suitably dramatic climax to this impressive score.

In recent decades it has become fashionable to deride William Wyler's remake of *Ben-Hur* (1959). The *Time Out Film Guide* review is a typical travesty of this epic-of-epic's robust central performances; in particular, Charlton Heston and Stephen Boyd. Other memorable features include its narrative cohesion, breathtaking action set-pieces, sumptuous cinematography and, not least, Miklós Rózsa's Oscar winning score which, like his music for *Quo Vadis*, draws on Greek, Hebrew and Oriental sources to colour his own compositional style (few fragments of purely Roman music have survived).

Rhino Records' 2CD-set of **Ben-Hur** (Rhino R2 72197, 1996) looks certain to become the definitive presentation. Available in their entirety for the first time, here are the original 1959 soundtrack recordings (digitally enhanced stereo) conducted by Rózsa. Despite the film's colossal running time (approx 213 minutes) many cues were shortened

and nine excised. The complete soundtrack runs to 2 hours 46 minutes and is an emotional *tour de force*: from the exquisite tenderness and intimacy of 'Love Theme' and 'Ring For Freedom', to the pounding, polyrhythmic accelerandos of the galley and battle cues (echoes of Holst's 'Mars'); the blazing fanfares and triumphal marches before the legendary chariot race, to the brooding despondency within the leper colony. Rózsa's brilliant achievement is having produced a massive statement that never becomes unwieldy,

Charlton Heston & Sophia Loren in *El Cid*

tiresome or pompous. As always, there's a gripping economy to his work, even in its large-scale romantic gestures; both the splendour and tyranny of ancient Rome are evoked with characteristic passion and discipline. The superb accompanying 50-page booklet, containing many photographs, includes a history of both silent and 1959 versions of *Ben-Hur*, notes on Miklós Rózsa, a narrative synopsis linked to musical cues, etc. An essential purchase for soundtrack aficionados.

Anthony Mann's account of Spain's 11th century national hero, Rodrigo Diaz (aka the Cid), is refreshingly understated as Hollywood epics go. Dependable Charlton Heston's athletic knightly exploits are infused with a moving humility; a voluptuous Sophia Loren brings notable dignity to Chimene, his wife. Rózsa's musicological research for *El Cid* (1961) led him to the 12th century Cantigas of Santa Maria and numerous Spanish folksongs; influences which, as usual, would be seamlessly absorbed into his own stylistic approach. The 'Prelude' is a dazzling piece of epic writing, its surging, heroic central theme one of Rózsa's most shatteringly beautiful creations. This newly recorded **El Cid** (Koch International Classics 3-7340-2 H1, 1996) by James Sedares and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, also conveys the bittersweet tension of 'Wedding Night' and luxuriant lyricism of 'Love Scene' with its poignant oboe and flute exchanges and passionate high register violin. Its rich orchestral detail, alive with vivid Spanish timbres and rhythms, makes *El Cid* as substantial and satisfying an experience as Ravel's earlier Spanish-influenced triumph *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907). As usual, an excellent sleevenotes presentation by Intrada.

a sorrowful nostalgia

Rózsa cites *El Cid* as his last major film score, and Alain Resnais' *Providence* (1977) as the last important film he worked on. He and the acclaimed French director greatly enjoyed their collaboration, based on mutual respect for each other's artistic integrity. **Providence** (CAM's Soundtrack Encyclopedia CSE 085, 1992) is one of the great films of the 70s; Rózsa's score earned him a César, the French Oscar. Time, Memory and Creativity (familiar Resnais themes) underpin its engrossing mind-game narrative(s), the product of a self-important, embittered, guilt-ridden, alcoholic, dying writer (splendidly played by John Gielgud) who invents various malevolent scenarios involving members of his family. Rózsa's music, a theme and variations, is a subtle combination of the dreamily elegant and portentous — these imbued with a sorrowful nostalgia. The darker variations recall his 1940s "psychological" and *films noir* scores, especially *Lost Weekend* (alcohol being an obvious narrative similarity, too). A haunting work from a master composer nearing the end of his film career. Unfortunately, CAM's sleevenote information is scant and sketchy.

Between these projects, Rózsa adapted themes from his *Concerto For Violin And Orchestra*, Op 24 (1953), for Billy Wilder's enchanting film *The Private Life Of Sherlock Holmes* (1970). Here, his wonderfully expressive score helps elevate the illustrious sleuth to a figure of considerable emotional complexity and Proustian stature; however, this sublime violin concerto deserves to be heard in its entirety on **The Complete Orchestral Music Volume IV** (Koch International Classics 3-7379-2-H1, 1997) where violinist Igor Gruppman gives a thrilling performance aided by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra under James Sedares. Gruppman's cadenza in the first movement is filled with the taut passion and spiky textures of Hungarian folk music; the heart-breaking nostalgic theme of the second is evoked by airy violin, delicately shaded by melancholy woodwinds, whereas the third movement abounds in vigorous folk-like rhythms. This stunning work is arguably Rózsa's finest and, in its bittersweet Magyar influence, sometimes resembles Bartók's second violin concerto (1938). The disc's other works, *Concerto For String Orchestra*, Op 17 (1943) and *Andante For Strings*, Op 22A (adapted from his first String Quartet in 1992), also testify to Miklós Rózsa's compelling writing for strings, while typifying the passionate intensity of his vision — where brooding, restless, anguished textures can suddenly release the most exquisite of melodies that burn into the soul. **R**

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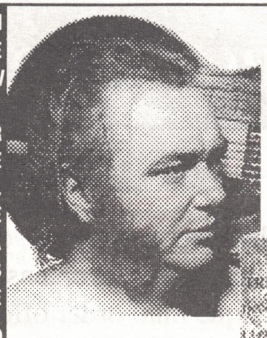

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singular pleasures

the art of the solo improvisor

Some people regard solo improvisation as little more than a public (or studio) demonstration of techniques and routines developed in private. Saxophonist **John Butcher** and acoustic guitarist **Roger Smith**, for whom solo improvisation has become an important aspect of their work over many years, think otherwise. Here they consider the challenges and rewards of this undervalued and misunderstood area of improvisation.

photo: Laurence M Svirchev

Learning The Weight Of Your Ingredients
John Butcher

If asked, I call myself an improvisor. The category seems to exist, be able to stretch in quite a few places, and is certainly where I've found the most musical rewards as a player. But how improvised can, or need, a solo performance be? It's not a vital question (it's enough that many great solos have come from people not using pieces of paper), but it's a practical issue if you decide you want to play on your own — concert after (sporadic) concert, year after year.

In my early days of (non-jazz) group playing I did a lot of experimenting to try to escape from the usual linear, melodic and dominating qualities of the saxophone. One of the reasons I became interested in trying solo playing was to see if the 'new' material I'd come up with could work on its own. Improvisation was the natural organisational tool, and after a few concerts I'd learnt a lot about making connections — but had also noticed recognisable pieces beginning to develop. I quite liked this, but worried about what it meant for long-term solo work. For a while, I almost envied composers; able to wrap up a piece, send it out into the world, and move on to the next. But a lot of the pleasure in giving solo concerts is connected to the hope of finding, spontaneously, some music you didn't really know about beforehand. Playing 'pieces' is too close to playing 'routines' and a concert is an opportunity for much more. Basically, as a live performer, improvising usually just feels better — with more chance for a little magic. By way of a bonus, this means engaging with what Derek Bailey (1) has described as a "search for whatever is endlessly variable."

That said, this isn't the only thing that I want to do as a soloist. A considerable attraction of solo playing is that you have full control. You can work with material that may be too inflexible for the push and pull of group improvising; you can plan ahead, you can attempt pieces that have a definite, sustained, flavour — that adhere to some concept. So far I've only really followed through with this kind of thing in recording. In performance I'm most likely to work with an ambiguous interaction between, loosely, the 'planned' and the 'free'. Their tensions and blurring — possibly only noticeable to me — bring the music alive (on a good night).

strategies

One approach is to try to start with something like an empty mind, and hope that the 'right' idea will come just the moment before making a sound. If it doesn't — and I'm not sure how you know — there's plenty to fall back on. Either way, things thereafter suggest themselves — all tied into the occasion. The room's acoustic, the concert's context, the saxophone's reed, the day's journey, what happened at my last concert, all play their part — even such old-fashioned things as my mood. When the music falls into familiar tracks I'll travel that way for a while, until something new presents itself. The first two pieces on the CD **London And Cologne** (3) seem good examples of this — with the room's hum prompting a moment of reflection a couple of minutes into 'A Thing Or Two'. Something I try to keep in mind is to give each musical element the right space for its qualities. Time is unusually focused when you're playing and, for instance, areas that are particularly familiar to you can appear to last for much longer than they really do.

multitracking

My first solo CD, **Thirteen Friendly Numbers** (2), was a studio recording. At that time I needed the excitement of a concert to play in the way I've been describing. Maybe I still do. Anyway, faced with just an engineer and a microphone I couldn't maintain the flow of a typical improvisation and decided to work in shorter chunks, with varying degrees of forethought. For instance, 'Notelet' was largely an attempt to play a melodic line that didn't evoke obvious idioms (an ongoing concern). In 'Buccinator's Outing' I was determined to use, somewhere, the rhythmic multiphonic patterns that ended up finishing the piece.

A considerable attraction of solo playing is that you have full control. You can work with material that may be too inflexible for the push and pull of group improvising; you can plan ahead, you can attempt pieces that have a definite, sustained, flavour — that adhere to some concept.

Although I still view them as solo music, four of the 13 pieces were multitracked and semi-composed. This is an area I'm still fascinated by, partly sonically and partly structurally. There's a kind of alchemy in how certain saxophone sounds build up when layered, such as in the multiphonics at the start of 'Bells And Clappers'. I've tried to introduce a little of this into concerts through the multitracked tape piece 'Shrinkdown' (3) for four sopranos. I play a live part with this, and one difficulty I found in making the tape was to leave enough out for this part to feel necessary. Another tape I've performed with is 'Sowari For Saxophone', composed by Phil Durrant from transformed tenor samples. In practice both pieces show the impossibility of really improvising to a fixed tape especially one that you've already heard. Instead, their purpose is to create reasonably specific music, hopefully kept fresh by the room to manoeuvre.

Improvisation and searching for what's hidden round the bell of your saxophone often go hand in hand. I've always enjoyed this kind of exploring — as well as the struggle of trying to put the discoveries to musical use. It can take time to find the right place for some elements, and in

the long run the most distinctive sounds often turn out to be of the least use. The worst feeling is if you suspect that all you're doing is demonstrating some kind of instrumental novelty. In fact, it's mainly through solo playing that I've become interested in revisiting (hopefully with a different slant) quite a few of the elements I originally wanted to get rid of. It's also where I've learnt ways of dealing with more traditional concerns such as line, pacing and flow — including, of course, avoiding them. Generally, I like to make links, such as utilising multiphonics the way a violinist might use double and triple stopping, or integrating 'new' possibilities with the saxophone's natural lyricism. Sometimes different techniques suggest their own music. 'Schism' (3), for instance, is a very simple melody given a completely different emotional space by the very harsh overtones that almost overwhelm it. Alternatively, the imagined musical situation comes first, and you work to find material to reach it.

For a while I came under the spell of John Cage — most of whose music I still enjoy — and it almost stopped me improvising. There's undoubtedly something refreshing about "allowing sounds to be themselves", but I decided I wanted to put sounds to use — and solo playing is where you really learn the weight of your ingredients. **R**

NOTES

(1) Derek Bailey, **Improvisation: Its Nature And Practice In Music** (The British Library National Sound Archive, 1992; revised 2nd edition)
(2) John Butcher, **Thirteen Friendly Numbers** (ACTA 6 CD, 1992)
(3) John Butcher, **London And Cologne** (Rastascan BRD 026 CD, 1996)

Recent recordings featuring **John Butcher** include **Trio Playing** (Incus CD28 CD) with Derek Bailey and Oren Marshall; **mouthfull of ecstasy** (Victo cd050 CD) with Phil Minton, Veryan Weston and Roger Turner; **Two Concerts** (FMP/OWN 90006 CD) with Phil Minton and Erhard Hirt; and **Spoombung** (Thoofa 1 CD) with Kev Hopper.

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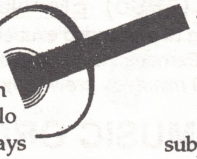
ACTA

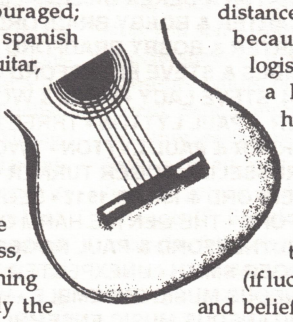
Solo Improvising
Roger Smith

Talking to yourself again." *Everyone has something others just don't understand.* Putting down the guitar and trying to be cogent about the above, frustration and irritation facilitates picking it up again trying to calm down by soloing and talking together (a system pioneered by D. Bailey) to a poor amanuensis "Fire up Biggy". Never underestimate the profound value of the listener whether or not another player. Solo states of mind exist in the wonderful condition of playing collective improvisation with kindred spirits. "Mustn't mother-duck" — C. Jeffrey, solos deliberately and finely crafted in and/or against harmonic contexts — C. Parker practised away from band. There is practice improvisation, forms of composition including many songs sung alone and improvisatory, instant composition, participation in imaginary bands in imaginary settings, soloing in a scene which is just a figment, or soloing in real gigs past or future. The guitar's image/baggage, eg, playing tennis rackets and invisible ones and continuing high pop profile affects solos. *Guitar samples, repeated ad nauseum and new players' slavish adherence to sounds past, pop up inadvertently in the oddest solo contexts. A style of constant repetition of 'licks' in live playing can lead to subtle alterations and rhythmic displacement and contrasting demands of an audience, say between listening and dancing. If an audience repeatedly listens to a recording with absolutely no repetition the transitory nature of a solo is somewhat defeated, and if good money is paid for this then the whole marketing system of improvised music may be highlighted in a thoughtful solo; the perceived 'preciousness' of the playing examined with the vexed question of expectation. Eisler/Brecht theories still relevant. Solos that take too much liberty with audience.* Playing with 'forbidden' expensive and unapproachable people, dead musician friends play, living ones are there from as long as 35 years back. An immediate audience can work a solo, they may spit at you or worse (they should always at least clap or boo). A non-present, imagined or known audience can influence, eg, DAT recorder in solitude for subsequent hearing, selection and eventual CD. People lived with, nearby or in adjacent flats listen as does the player as audient, playing, what's heard, hearing what's played. And there's just playing where constraints and sense of time are lost. There is no evidence of this playing in fact taking place, unless perhaps MI5 bugs or a witness hides in the wardrobe. Silliness aside, this seems the purest from of solo improvisation. 15 minutes which sees the light out of 150,000 minutes may have limited relevance. Improvised solos are not very different from folk, blues, spirit/mystic classical ones, shepherds on mountains, whistlers, people in baths, trees falling in forests, one hand claps, computer generated digital ad infinitums which the great and good of musicologists unceasingly catalogue and recommend (thanks C. Bell). Yes Mr Blackford, "Solo improv at its best has a particular intimacy of expression where the voice and personality... is *conveyed*... in a very direct way." Deflation of pomposity and 'seriousness' and profoundly deep criticism, both self and otherwise, have antecedents in various straight solo improvisations (eg, T. Monk), and much modern free solos (eg, S. Beresford, A. Tomlinson, M. Mengelberg, I. Schweizer, springing immediately to mind as noticeably so, and among many who've followed where it's almost de rigueur). Solos are onanistic. The situation in Sudan and the grim state of affairs between that horror and the isolation and protection around all this nonsense is nevertheless 'conveyed'. Personal, family, friends, colleagues and collective joy and sadness...

conveyed. European imp. music spaces seem to preclude broad expressiveness; thousands by necessity solo. No clear distinctions lie between practice, preparation and imp.. Children and others love bashing the guitar but tuned there's an easy to develop sense of soloing with rhythm, scales, chords (*from the many inversions that are available on the guitar* including *the bottom four strings*), microtonality and the unfathomable tuning vagaries of spanish guitar strings, ear, serialism, systems, wider and narrow intervals (flat nine, sharp seven, flat five, major and minor seconds), harmonics, percussion, timbre, acoustics and amplification; dipping into a vast repository of even an addled brain arises a unique solo for anyone who bothers. *There's* always *something new 'beneath the visiting moon'.*



Michael Gerzon emphasised the body clock where complicated circumstances may necessitate playing at very odd times each day, eg, 12-6am. No soundproofed music flats in this country so bands don't function much at this time. A spanish guitar plays quietly, doesn't disturb sleepers, is loud in a relative sense, and oudlike develops its own technique; cushions around deaden, notes stopped ringing, decay avoided, projection destroyed and artificial cut-ups encouraged; volume is lack of concentration. The spanish guitar can sound like any other type of guitar, many other instruments, particularly drums and bass, and other sounds, eg, the human voice; beautiful voices and languages can interact choirlike by day and almost impel solo playing in a certain way later. Sounds people like are cherry-picked: "Timberland". Bitterness, anger, tempestuousness, fear and loathing can slowly be dissipated. Or conversely the angst can be splurged out; Apollo/Dionysius solo. Soloing by commission. Improv luminaries sounding alarmingly like Kenny Ball will draw £2,000 a gig whilst great players are not able to buy a bag of chips. *Same old story but must be remembered as much as possible when presenting a 'commissioned' solo of this kind. Determinedly minimum participation in the 'event' is a principal feature of the solo.* Solos with feel for zeitgeist, marketing and commodity solos, fragility of cultures in the face of this materialism, solos in opposition to relentless self-aggrandisement, immorality of this highlighted. Solos cost money. Left-handed solos are played on expensive right-hand guitars to check if they'll bear conversion and set-ups. Paying to play in London drives people to solo, avoiding ghastly hierarchies and those activists consumed by scraps from music business sewer; *sad little London backwaters where solos are mainly restraints from smashing guitar over someone,* stay in yard and don't get mugged, bottled, mocked and coerced into solos in silly places. *Play Danny Boy or I'll kill you.* J. Butcher has noticed a sameness in audiences here. The terminally bourgeois seem to recurringly slum it for a while, so solos may develop around the subjects of short term media interest (H. Charlton et al), political fashion and notions of collectivity (LMC 1). Is a South Bank jamboree that much fun (imagined imp. buskers solo) and would a scummy old BR room offer a better chance for a large number to play over a very long period? (nostalgic solo). Celebratory solos when there's a glimpse of freedom and distraction from dark-age; doors-not-being-kicked-in solos. Solos required when band doesn't turn up because they're broke, with big audience from a long distance sitting there. Solos indoors because of the absurdity of the logistics, eg, Frank Perry requiring a lorry to get a fraction of his wonderful stuff to a gig, getting 40p for his troubles. Impossibility of transporting appropriate amplification. Solos designed to keep technique, health and strength (if lucky). Solos not 'too good'. Trust and belief are dangerous and abound when there's a bit of quality. Moral aspect, retaining consistency and eschewing change for the sake. Preparation for teaching and working with North London singers and players in Jazz, Soul Hi-life, Middle-Eastern, *Ethiopian and Eritrean (pentatonic feel)* improvising 'with-them' but alone. Solos deliberately strengthening, eg, plucking and plectrum technique in West African; *(and solos which use 5 fingers on neck)* classical pieces with bits of



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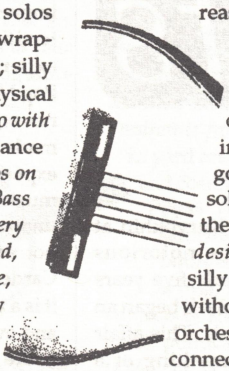
improv where sections forgotten. Incompetence as identity, nobility of failure and suspension of disbelief that music is anything other than a uniquely personal outpouring. Playing to everyone ever known, solos of gratitude and love for those who've genuinely helped, slow solos to avoid burnout, solos 'outside' music, recorded solos with no concept of deletion, avoidance of wrap-aroundness and routines, rituals, festivals; silly 'attacks' of the avant-garde, awareness of physical problems, eg, avoidance of retina damage, *solo with eyes closed, solos with broken fingernails*, avoidance of guitar damage, solos on SME guitar, *solos on Takemine spanish/electric, Strat, 175, Pro 2 Bass using Session amp with or without headphones, very loud or soft, all very different because of sound, neck size, string tension and type, eg, gauge, flat-wound or otherwise*, paradox of very individual people avoiding solos, John Stevens — very little, Neil Metcalfe hating it. Pottering about in studios and multi-tracking solos, solos which realise the patronisation of youth with reference to their attention spans; solos around real and imagined dramas, eg, cartoon concerning music-critic with huge left side to head, *improvised solos for a variety of dancers and fingers as the dancers; improvised solos to accompany difficult and not so difficult singers, solos accompanying quirky boiler (central heating)*, solos concerned with drum and bassers, computerers all very much alone perhaps waiting for hi-fi internet connections to arise, solos about waiting, killing 'time' in bus-stop, boredom, woodshedding, minimalist, new-complexity, Beckett or drug sense; 'killing' by tuneless artefact, selfishness, waste and pointlessness. Time equated with money. Strategies to be heard and struggling through solo to make-best-off, get perspective and personal understanding. Need for time to work through barriers and throwawayness. *Solos where there's little sense of time 'What day is it?'* Thought processes as part of rhythm and vice versa, behaviourism bashing, solipsism — *everything* required *is* or *isn't* in this solo, hedonism and the very inexact art of pleasing yourself, mocking of required artificiality and institutionalised red-herrings, beautiful dreams of others soloing, abruptly stopped by simultaneous conflict, *solos in art galleries as (a) exhibit (b) background music*, solos 'abruptly stopped' because sapping ability to cope with non-musical environment, anaesthetising solos making subsequent time easier, controlled madness as opposed to uncontrolled "Shall I switch the radio off?" 'Involvement' with no self-knowledge, bright solos after people forced together for non-musical reasons, deliberate failure to organise, problematic diversity, lingua franca solo, unrelenting perversity, impossibility of making anything of any worth except this solo, grinding newness and learning to like, good listening detracting from good soloing, making rules and breaking them, to educate, heuristic, and *solos designed to indicate state of health*, silly rhythms are funky, Miles Davis without Miles Davis, trying to rid piano, orchestra and jazz band from guitar solo, connecting solo with non-musical task, soloing just another continuous tense, keeping music live, *important that people aren't totally driven to their CDs — solos built around gigs (eg, 20 Saturday afternoons of solos), function and content of equal importance, should soloists organise or is onus on listener(s) if the 'business' is clearly detrimental? Solos illustrating this fact.* Finding hard-won space for influences and freedom to jump track, bricolage solos, everything conspiring to stop you solos *naturally compressed and psychotic*, hopelessness of finding pre-figured sound and transitory nature of good vein (don't 'enjoy' too much), people more important than any music structure, easiest way to feel alive solo, *Gyorky's 'feeling the air from another planet' (definitely not Saturn)*, getting back to historical and geographical roots (S. Beresford regarding improvisors as latter-day folk artists), long-pause solos, search and reflect..... Solo to blank out Brian Eno on radio. "Don't forget to say cod liver oil is useful." **R**



Photo, page 28: **Steve Ford**

Recent recordings featuring **Roger Smith** include his solo album **Unexpected Turns** (Emanem 4014 CD); **Hot And Cold Heroes** with SME, featuring John Stevens and Nigel Coombes (Emanem 4008 CD); **A New Distance** (Acta 8 CD) with SME, featuring John Stevens and John Butcher; and **S&M** (Incus CD24 CD) with Neil Metcalfe.

Prime cuts

Sergey Kuryokhin, Divine Madness
(Leo Records CD LR 813-816 4CDs)
Discovering the music of Sergey Kuryokhin at about the age of 13 through the notorious recording **Ways Of Freedom** (already five years old at the time) was a revelation to me. It began an off and on love affair with his music. This affair had unfortunately gone into something of a remission in recent years. However, listening to this lavish box set has made me, now twice the age I was then, reassess exactly what it was about Kuryokhin's music that I had found so attractive.

The set consists of some reissues of favourite recordings and a disc of previously unheard material. It is not an attempt to exhaustively document his work nor is it a morbid memorial to the pianist's tragic early death. It provides an intelligent summary of the range and depth of his work between his previously unreleased first recordings of 1980 through to a solo piano work from 1986. **Ways Of Freedom** is not present but some exuberant material from the same session is. I said **Ways Of Freedom** was notorious, those who know the recording will no doubt remember the debate — was it speeded up or was the pianist superhuman. Leo Feigin always claimed it wasn't, and for a long time I believed this, until years later a pianist friend and I noticed that some of his runs went above the range of the piano. The liner notes make some interesting revelations; Feigin now maintains that it was recorded on tape made for voice, thus giving the sound a sharp metallic edge. However, Alex Kan, Kuryokhin's friend, admits "...a technical mistake crept in and raised the pitch of the sound." One of the most fortunate technical mistakes ever made, because the debate undoubtedly added considerably to the pianist's mystique. Listening to the non-speeded up material, however, renders the debate irrelevant. His technical brilliance is still breathtaking, but it is the fluid melodic passages that are perhaps most impressive.

Aside from the vast technique, what always impressed me about Kuryokhin's work was the terrific optimistic, almost naive, energy of his experiment, most fervently displayed by his Pop Mechanics ensemble. This is music that could never, at least in the early 1980s, have been made in the west. The musicians are unafraid to experiment in an abandoned way that we western musicians seem to have forgotten. Their music is unafraid of tradition and 'mistake' in a fashion not seen in western music since the heyday of Cardew's Scratch Orchestra in the 1960s. Perhaps it is a result of Soviet cultural isolation, censorship and even danger that provided a genuine need to make music like this — Thatcherism was bad but at least you couldn't be arrested for free improvisation.

Box sets like this are often strictly for the completist or the devoted aficionado, but this one should be in the collection of anyone interested in music. I didn't expect to still feel the same about this music, though the celebration of the act of creation and *joie de vie* that are displayed throughout continues to light me up. Kuryokhin is an example to the jaded western listener/musician, and the world is a poorer place without him. (*Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA*)
Bruce Coates

Evan Parker & Eddie Prévost, Most Materiall
(Matchless Recordings MRCD33 2CDs)
Derek Bailey & Tony Oxley, Soho Suites
(Incus CD29/30 2CDs)
Paul Dunmall/John Adams/Mark Sanders, Ghostly Thoughts (Hat Hut hatOLOGY 503 CD)
With so much of the godfathers of improv flooding the shops, you may ask yourself if you need these two double CDs. The answer is yes.

Of late, and on **Most Materiall**, Evan Parker has made his horns seem like putty in his hands. His playing gives the illusion of being effortless, as if a small drop in multiphonics and momentum has produced an alternative tempered dimension.

Here he finds an omnipotent timbre, which is characterised by the absence of — but potential for or threat of — eruption. This results in a thick gluey lyricism. Its apotheosis comes 20 minutes into 'That More Might Have Beene Done, or Sooner' (track titles courtesy of the English philosopher Francis Bacon) when Parker's tenor overflows into reflective song. Prévost provides a rich texture of sound tapestry, coupled with bionically linear drumming. They play not in parallel, but absolutely as one. Despite their subsequent doubts, the CDs are every bit as good as their live date together. Now, how about another get together with AMM?

Bailey and Oxley have played together since the days of Joseph Holbrooke in 1963, and their history has bred a particularly fertile understanding. The later disc, recorded live in New York in 1995 is, due to its sharp sound mix, an essential recording. It allows us to hear Bailey scorching the earth with far more clarity than many of his recent discs, and it allows the nuances of the quieter passages to ping too. Oxley shows how to play loud without the showmanship of fusion, and you may want to pin down your speakers. But if a drop of the hard stuff is not your cup of tea, you can opt for the rarefied ambience of the studio recording from 1977. This finds Bailey playing acoustic as well as electric guitar, and Oxley playing an amplified kit, armed with various electronic gadgetry, producing a hypnotic effect. Which is nice.

With the merest hint in some quarters that the second generation of British improv is losing ground to its US free counterparts, comes a kick in the pants from Dunmall (saxes), Adams (guitar) & Sanders (drums). This is such a fresh, inventive, dynamic, mighty recording, that I may need a dose of hyperbole. The only comparison to be found is the initially menacing late 70s/early 80s No Wave/harmolodics, but without the chugging funky backbeats. Adams' extraordinary guitar playing is the obvious fulcrum, as one minute he's helping fire up dangerous Dunmall, the next whacking out rhythmic chords to propel supersonic Sanders. Choosing highlights is unnecessary, but 'Abit Of Rice, Nice' with its movement through various moods, may prove to be the most savoury. Long live the new punk jazz! (*Matchless Recordings, 2 Shetlock's Cottages, Matching Tye, near Harlow, Essex CM17 OQR, England / Incus Records, 14 Downs Road, London E5 8DS / Hat Hut Records, Box 461, 4106 Therwil, Switzerland*)
Mark Greenaway

Ensemble Aleph, Arrêts Fréquents
(Vand'Oeuvre 9813 CD)
Michael Mantler, The School Of Understanding
(ECM 1648 2CDs)
Alvin Lucier, Panorama
(Lovely Music LCD 1012 CD)
Each of these releases deals with an aspect of the aesthetics of listening. Ensemble Aleph assemble 68 extremely short contemporary classical pieces (from 3 seconds to 2 minutes). The nature of the brevity of the pieces varies: in some cases, it is an attempt at miniaturisation (Webern's **Three Pieces**, Opus 11); in others, a result of chance procedures (Cage's **Variations 2**). Elsewhere, particularly in the numerous pieces by minor French composers, the intention is difficult to define. Listening is awkward, too: whilst the sleeve helpfully offers an alphabetical index of composers for the tracks, the pieces are arranged randomly on the CD and the sleevenotes encourage further randomisation during listening. To follow such advice is to effectively erase both the compositional intent and the very act of composition.

Mantler's self-styled "sort-of-an-opera" exhibits his characteristic compositional materials of chromatic melodies and a preference for the tritone, both shot against washes of an ambiguously minor orchestration. Jack Bruce, a long-time interpreter of Mantler's song settings, takes a major role here in a series of scenes that deal with the relationships between a group of students in a language school ('The School Of Languages' was the work's original title). As with many of Mantler's settings, the apparently dramatic gestures of the music are curiously static; the work resembles the stasis of John Adams' operatic tableaux in such as **Nixon In China** and, of course, the (deliberate) inconsequences of writers as diverse as Beckett, Edward Gorey and Pinter, all of whose work Mantler has set previously. For Canterbury completists — John Greaves and Robert Wyatt also have roles in this 'opera'.

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As Kyle Gann has noted, listening to Alvin Lucier's music is not about listening to the notes, it's about listening to how Lucier's methods sculpt the very air and transform the space around us. In 'Wind Shadows', the first and longest track on this CD, the virtuosic microtonal scales of trombonist Roland Dahinden work against an unchanging sine wave to generate interference fringes and beating patterns. A similar effect is obtained in Dahinden's duetting with pianist Hildgard Kleeb on 'Panorama'. Elsewhere, Kleeb's piano is transformed by placing various vessels on or near the piano, or by the positioning of snare drums around the performance space. In both cases, the piano becomes alarmingly fuzzy, an unsettling out-of-focus sound (if that's possible) that challenges our very notion of concentrated listening. (*Vand'Oeuvre Records, c/o CCAM, BP 126, F 54504 Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy Cedex, France / ECM distributed by New Note: 01689 877884 / Lovely Music, 10 Beach Street, New York, NY 10013, USA*)
Chris Atton

Soft Machine, Virtually
(Cuneiform Rune 100 CD)
Present, Certitudes
(Cuneiform Rune 107 CD)
Curlew, Fabulous Drop
(Cuneiform Rune 105 CD)
Phil Manzanera/801, Live At Manchester University 02/11/77 (Expression Records EXVP2 CD)
We already knew that Soft Machine, live, was a great group, but **Virtually** is a rare find: clearly, musically recorded, it presents the band on a peak night in March 1971 at Radio Bremen; the interplay between the musicians is stunning, the material still sounds fresh. At the centre, Wyatt's breathing drumming is a real joy, and it's still a surprise to see his fluid style and Hopper's 'rigid' bass playing — on paper not the most compatible of combinations — perfectly match (Those who have doubts about the creativity of their own bass playing should avoid listening to Hopper's solos). By the way, this is not the 'mellow Canterbury' we've come to know from inaccurate tales: though at times tender, this music can be harsh, even ferocious. Buy a few copies for those who like, say, June of 44.

Guitarist, keyboardist and composer Roger Trigaux started Present after quitting Univers Zero, the Belgian group whose music — meticulous, mysterious, odd-metered, darkly violent — was one of the most distinctive of the Rock In Opposition era. Present's music didn't differ that much from that of the mother group — check Zero's **Ceux Du Dehors** and **Uzed**, and Present's **Triskaidekaphobie**, all on Cuneiform. After a long hiatus, Trigaux reformed the group together with his son Reginald, also a guitarist, giving more space to the vocal parts. After the embryonic **C.O.D. Performance, Live!** was a return to form but, despite the presence of Dave Kerman (of 5uu's), it didn't feel like the work of a real band. Now **Certitudes** brings it all back home by integrating the formidable rhythmic axis of Segers and Denis from Univers Zero. As usual, I didn't like the vocals, but maybe that's just me. Present's music is nowadays an anachronism — it's up to the listener to decide in what sense of the word.

Democratically led by saxophonist George Cartwright, Curlew has always been a strange beast. Eclectic almost to a fault (but a group so hip as to cover Jack Bruce's 'As You Said', on **Bee**, is all right by me) with an ever-changing personnel sometimes giving the impression of the proverbial "too many cooks", there's no Curlew album I don't own, but there's none I consider 'perfect', either. Until this one. Was it the food? The studio? As much as I like J. Pippin Barnett's drumming (he's one of my favourites ever) I suspect that the Rupel/Wolleson axis brought a perspective that, though simpler on the surface, is just right for this material; from the fiddle-like cadences of 'Dog House On The Moon', to the beautiful and atypical 'Neither, Baby', or the funny sounds of 'Crazy Feet, Sensible Shoes' which border on Reichelian territory.

Live At Manchester University 02/11/77 gives us the chance to hear the group assembled by Manzanera to briefly promote the then new **Listen Now**. Who cares? Well, if, like me, you find a song which sports a rollicking groove strongly reminiscent of The Temptations, with a text depicting an Orwellian atmosphere sung by well-mannered English voices absolutely irresistible, then you'll like most of this CD. Compared to the first live album (which to my ears has always sounded reworked in the studio) there's no Eno and no Simon Phillips, whose fusioneer-gone-

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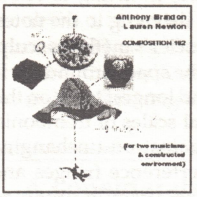
LEO RECORDS NEW RELEASES

CD LR 250
TIBOR SZEMZO
RELATIVE THINGS,
SELECTED SOUNDSCAPES (1994-1997)

The music for this CD has been selected from about five hours of music which Tibor Szemzo composed for five moving pictures by Peter Forgas, Ferenc Moldovany, and Adam Csillag. Like the previous Tractatus (CD LR 227), all 12 tunes on this CD are hauntingly beautiful, yet spiritually uplifting. Tibor's music is unique. It is a testimony to the fact that music composed for films can have a life of its own. Total duration 62'30.



CD LR 251
ANTHONY BRAXTON/ LAUREN NEWTON
COMPOSITION 192
(FOR TWO MUSICIANS & CONSTRUCTED ENVIRONMENT)

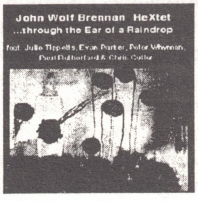
Recorded live at the "Unsung Music" Festival in London, June 20, 1996, this piece belongs to a new category of works, which Anthony Braxton calls "Ghost Trance Musics". Braxton had long admired Lauren Newton's work, her "reading ability, perfect intonation, dynamic creativity". This concert marked the first time that they performed together.

CD LR 252
THE IVO PERELMAN TRIO
SEEDS, VISION AND COUNTERPOINT

With this CD, the Brazilian born saxophonist Ivo Perelman, continues his meteoric rise to fame. He is accompanied by Dominic Duval on bass, and Jay Rosen on drums. His passionate, powerful and provocative playing has been compared to that of Gato Barbieri and Albert Ayler, yet his own inherent sense of melodicism sets him apart. Recorded 1996, notes by Bill Milkowski.

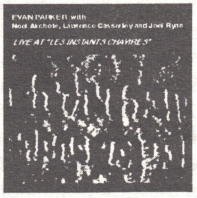
CD LR 253
SORGEN / RUST / STEVENS TRIO
NOVELLA

The name of Michael Jefry Stevens creeps into our catalogue again and again and every time in a different company of musicians. However, in every context he retains his individual way of playing the piano. Yes, we believe in his talent, and we shall support him for as long as we can. With drummer Harvey Sorgen and bassist Steve Rust he achieves new heights of creativity in blending composition with improvisation.



CD LR 254
JOHN WOLF BRENNAN HEXTET
...THROUGH THE EAR OF A RAINDROP

The subtitle of this CD is "The POEms PrOjEct". It is a rare union of language and music, of written scores and free improvisation, featuring some of the most distinctive voices in British modern music: **Julie Tippetts, Peter Whyman, Evan Parker, Paul Rutherford** and **Chris Cutler.** Accompanying this CD is a 16-page booklet full of poetry of Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, Edgar Allan Poe, etc. Liner notes by Stuart Broomer.



CD LR 255
EVAN PARKER WITH
NOEL AKCHOTE, LAWRENCE CASSERLEY AND JOEL RYAN
LIVE AT "LES INSTANTS CHAVIRES"

Read this: *"History will bear this out: Evan Parker is the most important saxophone innovator since the late '60s"* (Down Beat, April 1998). We'd known it all along, hadn't we, yet it's nice to get a confirmation from the most backward-looking jazz magazine in USA. This CD might be called "another electronic project of Evan Parker". It is a result of three days of performances in Paris, December 1997. Notes by Evan Parker, total time: 77'30.

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bonkers style added a fresh perspective. But here we have the rare chance to hear one of the most underrated bass players ever — Bill MacCormick. I wouldn't pass. (*Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8427, USA / Expression Records, c/o Voiceprint, P.O. Box 5, Derwentside, Co. Durham DH9 7HR, England*)
Giuseppe Colli

Anthony Braxton & Georg Graewe, Duo (Amsterdam) 1991 (Okka Disk OD12018 CD)
David Rosenboom & Anthony Braxton, Two Lines (Lovely Music LCD 3071 CD)
Sylvie Courvoisier & Mark Nauseef, Birds Of A Feather (Unit UTR 4102 CD)
The Nail Nippers, Bitin' Thru
(FKK 003 CD)
The already voluminous output of Anthony Braxton recordings has, in recent years, reached a level which is liable to induce a sense of fatigue or resignation in even the most sympathetic listener, a feeling that none but Graham Lock can keep pace, leading to the unfortunate temptation to dismiss his fecundity as egomaniacal excess or a labyrinth with no obvious entry point. The result of such frustration is that much great music will be missed. For the faithful, but impoverished, listener however, it becomes critical to decipher which CDs are worth their time. **Duo (Amsterdam) 1991** is worth everybody's time. A meeting of like-minded, clearly differentiated individuals (every paradox another creative resource) with a level of accelerated, advanced communication moulded in the moment of the music's creation; for this, unlike so much of Braxton's recent music, is wholly improvised, with both players drawing on a vast knowledge of extant music traditions to create something vital and new.

Braxton's duo with David Rosenboom is, on several levels, a less energising listen. It centres on the title piece, a Rosenboom composition which, like Braxton's new Ghost Trance music (seven volumes so far on his own Braxton House label), seems like a strategy to stultify the kind of individual resourcefulness so evident on the encounter with Graewe, who is a more articulate player than Rosenboom whose identikit avant-piano playing is too often reliant on sweeping runs and indiscriminate note clusters which nullify the splendour of his partner.

In any duo, directional empathy and mutual respect are crucial. These elements are singularly lacking in the Swiss pairing of Sylvie Courvoisier and Mark Nauseef. She is a subtle, if unoriginal pianist, conversant with the language of extended piano techniques, but exhibits a nervous, hesitant reluctance to commit. Perhaps the circumstances proved inhibiting because any chance of her finding a convincing purpose is hindered by Nauseef's bombastic percussion — a dry, limited, colourless incursion which distorts any potential for true dialogue.

The Nail Nippers (a duo of Frank Köllges and Jeffrey Morgan) by contrast work on the highest level of interconnected responsiveness. Morgan's acerbic alto is met by a rolling, chattering drumming, unflashy and snare-led — a two-way interrogation which leads to insights that they are compelled to explore. A stern insistence that what they do has meaning. (*Okka Disk, P.O. Box 146472, Chicago, Illinois 60614-6472, USA / Lovely Music, 10 Beach Street, New York, NY 10013, USA / Unit Records, P.O. Box 53, CH-1789 Lugnorre, Switzerland / FKK, c/o Frank Köllges, Auenweg 173, 51063 Köln, Germany*)
Declan O'Driscoll

Michel Doneda/Beñat Achiary/Kazue Sawaï, Temps Couché (Victo cd055 CD)
Phil Minton/John Butcher/Erhard Hirt, Two Concerts (FMP/Own 90006 CD)
John Wolf Brennan Hextet, ...Through The Ear Of A Raindrop (Leo CD LR 254 CD)
cris cheek/Sianed Jones, Songs From Navigation (Reality Street Editions) (Book & CD)
Recent years have seen a resurgence in the use of the voice in improvised music. This selection shows not only the wordless singing one has come to expect in improvised music, but also the welcome return to the use of text as a basis for such music making.

Minton is perhaps the most familiar of all improvising singers and for me by far the best. It is a joy then finally to get to hear his relatively longstanding trio with saxophonist Butcher and guitarist Hirt on disc. The array of sound and noise the trio convey is breathtaking. There is little use of 'traditional' techniques but instead sounds and

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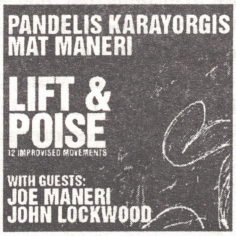
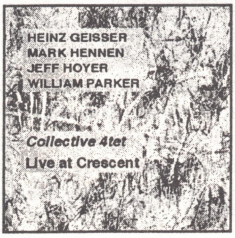
LEO LAB CD 039
NATSUKI TAMURA
A SONG FOR JYAKI

A solo CD by the Japanese trumpeter Natsuki Tamura who can be heard on two previous Leo Lab releases: in duo with a pianist Satoko Fujii (LEO LAB CD 029) and as a member Satoko Fujii's big band (LEO LAB CD 037). A SONG FOR JYAKI demonstrates both Natsuki's phenomenal technique and ability to compose. He is a musician of great originality with extraordinary command of timbre.



LEO LAB CD 041
PANDELIS KARAYORGIS/MAT MANERI with guests **Joe Maneri and John Lockwood**
LIFT & POISE

Pianist Pandelis Karayorgis and violinist Mat Maneri stand outside all contemporary trandy whirls, creating their own space. With this release, their second on Leo Lab, they draw the listener out of his or her standard mindset. As Bill Shoemaker writes in the liner notes: *"Call it an extension of cool, albeit one that goes far beyond the usual jazz parameters.."*

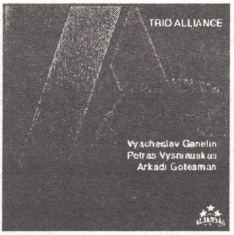


LEO LAB CD 043
COLLECTIVE 4TET
LIVE AT CRESCENT

This is the third release of **Collective 4tet** on Leo Lab and the first recorded live. George Kerr, the reviewer of the concert in Belfast, Northern Ireland, wrote about the performance: *"At times the quartet seem to be on the knife edge of success and failure – often flirting with either side of the devide. The attentive capacity audience seems to add danger to the moment and the cathartic experience forces the players into a fiery freedom of texture, intensity and higher levels of creativity."*

LEO LAB CD 040
THE SOEGAARD ENSEMBLE
CRONOX

The Soegaard Ensemble (Jan Krogh – trumpet, Fredrik Soegaard – guitar, soundprocessing, Steffen Poulsen – alto sax, computer, Frank Jensen – piano, Lars Juul – percussion) plays contemporary improvised music using *chaos-theory*, forwards- and backwards-running time/space structures and implicate orders from the boundaries of science. Guitar solos run by *mandelbrot fractal* algorithms and abstract sound-structures turning the horizontal time of traditional musical forms into *vertical-time sound tapestries*, bring this truly contemporary music far into 21st century.



LEO LAB CD 042
TRIO ALLIANCE
VYACHESLAV GANELIN / PETRAS VYSNIAUSKAS / ARKADI GOTESMAN

The first release of the Trio Alliance recorded during their extensive tour of Lithuania in 1995. Vyacheslav Ganelin is not trying to reconstract the music of the legendary Ganelin Trio disbanded in 1987. His new partners, Petras Vysniauskas - saxophones and Arkadi Gotesman - percussion, have highly individual voices which help them to create highly original, spontaneously structured music. Total duration over 70 minutes.

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textures are combined in an almost sculptural fashion. However, their music is by no means always abrasive and there are moments of the most delicate beauty, humour and warmth. This is improvising of the highest quality — quite simply superb.

The combination of Doneda/Achiary/Sawaï is less successful but in many ways equally fascinating. The quality of Achiary's voice shows a heavy debt to Minton without matching his inventiveness and immaculate articulation. However, in less Mintonesque passages he employs an impressive range of vocal images. Doneda is at his inventive best throughout and provides many of the highlights of the recording. However, as a whole the work lacks variety and improvisations too often run out of steam. The problem of combining the very different musical traditions that these musicians represent is not always satisfactorily resolved. The koto playing of Sawaï with its distinctive rich sound has such cultural resonance that it provides particular difficulties in this respect. Nevertheless, the struggle makes for some often intriguing listening.

John Wolf Brennan's group combines some very familiar names: Parker, Rutherford, Julie Tippett, Whyman and Cutler. The music provides part-improvised/part-composed settings of some equally familiar poets, including Heaney, Edgar Allan Poe and Shakespeare. Most of the settings are in traditional song forms, which give way to improvisation, and the music encompasses a variety of styles from jazz through to rock. This brings highlights like Evan Parker playing what I can only describe as jazz lines. Tippett sings with skill and gusto and it's good to hear her singing 'straight' songs, something which she does all too rarely.

cheek and Jones' collaboration is often fascinating. The package combines a CD and book that complement each other. The music on the CD, with one exception, does not set the poetry but rather the CD acts as a kind of illustration to it. Jones has a powerful voice and her violin playing has equal strength. Overall, the music tends to be a little unfocused, yet is saved by the immense passion and energy with which it is performed. (*FMP distributed by Cadillac: 0171 278 7391 / Les Disques Victo, C.P. 460 Victoriaville, Québec, Canada, G6P 6T3 / Reality Street Editions, 4 Howard Court, Peckham Rye, London SE15 3PH*)
Bruce Coates

Paul Dunmall/Tony Levin, Essential Expressions
(Cadence CJR 1079 CD)
Mujician, Birdman
(Cunieform Rune 82 CD)
Evan Parker/Paul Dunmall/Barry Guy/Tony Levin, Birmingham Concert
(Rare Music RM 026 CD)
All three of these albums feature Paul Dunmall on saxes and Tony Levin on drums and percussion. Individually, each is a fine album. Taken together, they are very instructive about the ways players change in different contexts. Paul Dunmall has always been rated as a player who responds sensitively to others in a group context (in evidence I need only cite The British Saxophone Quartet). These three recordings fully support and reinforce that judgement.

The duo album (produced by Evan Parker) presents the essence of Dunmall and Levin, unadorned. Dunmall demonstrates what a melodic player he can be. He has a rich, full sound on tenor allied to a fluid, fluent style. On occasions, he can produce a much harsher, more abrasive tone, which is effective here because it is used sparingly. Levin, as ever, provides delicate support, sometimes barely audible but always vital. And, of course, he can also thunder when he needs to. The two have played so much together that many of their reactions to each other seem like second nature. The title track 'Essential Expressions', at over 22 minutes, is a *tour de force* that allows both players full reign to demonstrate what they can do, both individually and together.

Birdman is Mujician's third album. Dunmall and Levin are joined by Paul Rogers on bass and leader Keith Tippett in an awesome foursome. Like their last release, **Poem About The Hero, Birdman** was recorded in a "live studio environment", giving a live atmosphere without intrusive noise. The CD contains three lengthy pieces. All fit the established Mujician *modus operandi*; despite the length of the pieces (28, 31 and 16 minutes) there are not many really long solo flights. Rather, there is plenty of back-and-forth musical dialogue within the group, and instrumental sounds are used to

provide tonal coloration as much as to make solo statements. So, for instance, even during a bass solo, as on 'The Hands Are Just Shadows', there will be frequent interjections from the sax. Dunmall plays tenor and alto, producing a distinctive hard-edged tone on the smaller horn, which is almost painfully intense to listen to.

Almost inevitably, **Birmingham Concert** (recorded in March 1993) is dominated by Evan Parker. His rapid fire playing sets the agenda for all those around him. From the start, the other three players adopt Parker's style (reacting and responding sensitively to it). On the opener, 'Lion', Dunmall and Parker both play tenor sax, and their interactions are superb. It is wonderful to hear Parker play with another sax that can be as serpentine as his. (*Cadence Records, Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679, USA / Rare Music, Asterton Hall Farm, Lydbury North, Shropshire, SY7 8BH, England*)
John Eyles

Gary Smith, Stereo
(Chronoscope CPE 2003-2 CD)
Eugene Chadbourne, End To Slavery
(Intakt CD 047 CD)
Goncalo Falcao, Load
(Ananana FICTA 001 CD)
Gary Smith unleashes 75 minutes and 22 seconds of overdriven guitar improvisation, accompanied on some tracks by Dave Sturt on bass guitar and Lou Ciccotelli on drums. What seems at first to be an exposition of the visceral thrill of the instrument stripped bare of melodic, harmonic or rhythmic considerations belies a serious almost classical attention to technique and form. Given Smith's economy of style you'd have to be an aficionado to remain gripped over the length of the album, but the balance between repetition and change in both the overall structure and the detail sustains it.

Eugene Chadbourne inhabits the territory between John Fahey and Derek Bailey and, yes, that is a lot of land. He straddles it with an eclectic performance style that avoids pastiche due to the strength of his personality, and the inventiveness of his writing and playing. **End To Slavery** is a studio based album of, with the exception of Coltrane's ballad 'Naima', original songs and instrumentals. Don't be put off by the fact that several of the pieces have been released previously; while acknowledging bluegrass roots his wonderful wide ranging improvisations render them afresh. A good place to introduce yourself to the anarchic charms of Chadbourne.

Load is a mini-CD (21 minutes, 14 seconds) utilising guitar, sampler and tape. It's not totally obvious what's going on, but to my ears it seems that we are initially introduced to a series of processed guitar samples (simply running quickly through the banks); these then get layered, edited and reordered. At around the midpoint more conventional guitar playing becomes evident. Whether this is live (we are told that this is an album of solo guitar improvisation) or on tape is not clear. The sampled sounds drop away until we're left with the guitar which starts to become processed itself. Confused? You wouldn't be if you heard it. What sounds like a mechanistic nightmare, is a sensitive and inventive piece of music in Portuguese guitarist Falcao's hands. (*Chronoscope Records, BCM Box 1079, London WC1N 3XX / Intakt Records, PO Box 468, CH 8024 Zürich, Switzerland / Ananana, Apartado 21 671, 1137 Lisboa Codex, Portugal*)
Gus Garside

The Little Red Spiders, Music Of The Little Red Spiders (TES TESCD0101 CD)
Small Things, Pregnant Longer Than Humans
(Infinite Chug CHUG 4 LP)
The Thirteen Ghosts with Derek Bailey & Thurston Moore, Legend Of The Blood Yeti
(Infinite Chug CHUG 5 CD)
Tony Buck (of Peril and The Necks) brings together Andy (from Dutch punk band The Ex), Joe Williamson and Stevie Wishart, to produce a very atmospheric work which evolves from Middle Eastern lament, via "the dreamy groove of dub and trip-hop", on to a chaotic ambient landscape that resolves itself into a pounding of drums, and beyond. Wishart's hurdy-gurdy is particularly effective, offering up elegiac drones that coat the music in solemnity and mystery. Sometimes sounding like the kind of soundtrack horror movies *should* have, this is an often chilling work.

Small Things consists of David Evan Campbell, Jason Williams, and guitarist and all-round tape

scene maestro Andrew Clare, whose label Graphic Death brought us The Dr Switch All-Stars, Godzilla Burnout and I'm Being Good. Infinite Chug is his vinyl/CD baby and has produced some fine stuff. That said, **Pregnant**'s two guitar and drums ramble is a little weak in parts, what our revered editor (*Oh, you're too kind, Mr Barker — Ed*) might describe as "noodling", a rather aimless twiddling and strumming with no real core.

Blood Yeti (which also features Clare) is Alex Ward and Switch's follow-up to their storming **Giganti Reptilicus Destructo Beam** (on Scatter) and features two giants of their respective scenes. 'Book One' features Bailey, 'Two' Moore, and both bring their own concerns which 13 Ghosts support and play inside. Alex Ward is a fine sax player and easily holds his own with The Big Names. The mood is more sustained than **GRDB**, and the comic-book humour is largely missing, which should make this a more lasting work. Bailey is excellent as usual, while Switch's use of tapes and samples is stunning, often using mutated sax sounds that make this into real ensemble stuff. There's no doubt that sampling is gaining maturity in improv, as is Thurston Moore. His work here is far from the idle bombast of some of his earlier non-SY work. He still uses drones and that old No Wave guitar strum, but with much more subtlety and flexibility. This is probably his best work outside Sonic Youth. (*TES, Schönhauser Alee 59 B, 10437 Berlin, Germany / Infinite Chug, 14 Worcester Close, Langdon Hills, Essex, SS16 6TW, England*)

Jim Barker

Manfred Schulze Bläserquintett, Viertens: Nummer 12 (FMP CD 87 CD)
Rova Saxophone Quartet, Bingo
(Victo cd056 CD)
FJF, Blow Horn
(Okka Disk OD 12019 CD)

In **Rubberneck 22**, I reviewed **Konzertino**, the more recent work by the Manfred Schulze group, and mentioned that two LPs were to be reissued on one CD; actually, it's one-and-a-half, the live **Nummer 12** from 1985 and half the studio **Viertens** from 1986. The former, at 40 minutes, is the more uncompromising; the full line-up is trombonist Johannes Bauer and four saxophonists, Manfred Schulze, Manfred Hering, Dietmar Diesner, Heiner Reinhardt, but much of the interest lies in the way Schulze breaks up the performance: solos and duos break out from the characteristic choral sound, but it's always organic, always logical, highlighting the advanced techniques of the individual players. Compare and contrast with the later version on **Konzertino**. The two **Viertens** pieces reinforce the view that this was one of the most radical, yet underappreciated, groups to emerge from the GDR. It's apparent that Schulze had a tough time fitting in with accepted notions of either free jazz or contemporary music, but this is another strong release. Now FMP, how about a reissue of the rest of **Viertens** with the live 1988 LP on Amiga?

The Rova CD is a real delight. Apart from one piece by bandmember Larry Ochs, the compositions are by British writers: two each by Lindsay Cooper and Barry Guy (commissioned with help from the Arts Council), and a Jimmy Giuffre tribute by Fred Frith (!) commissioned with help from *Reader's Digest* (!!). The Frith piece, part of a longer work, is an elegant and very apt tribute. There are short and long versions of Guy's 'Witch Gong Game'; the shorter more of a sketch, the longer allowing the exploration of wide-ranging group dynamics and some outstanding solos. The Cooper pieces were the ones that really struck me; the longer of the two, 'Face In The Crowd', is chock-full of invention and lyricism. Rova play with great verve, but it sounds unmistakably Cooper, which is fine round these parts.

Blow Horn pitches Swede Mats Gustafsson (tenor, baritone, flageolet) in with Chicagoans Ken Vandermark (tenor, bass-clarinet), Kent Kessler (bass) and Steve Hunt (drums); if anyone thinks Gustafsson isn't an obvious partner, think again. Only the first piece is real burnout stuff, though most of this studio session was collectively composed; the other group-composed pieces, plus the sole Gustafsson number, explore different approaches and instrumental combinations with some success. (*Free Music Production, Postbox 100227, D-10562 Berlin, Germany / Okka Disk, P.O. Box 146472, Chicago, Illinois 60614-6472, USA*)

Gerard F Tierney

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Jean Derome, Je Me Souviens — Hommage À Georges Perec (Ambiances Magnétiques AM 044 CD)
Jean Derome, La Bête — The Beast Within (Ambiances Magnétiques AM048 CD)
Fred Frith, The Previous Evening (ReR FF1 CD)

Although best known as the author of novels which recreated and reshuffled the standard narrative form (eg, *Life A User's Manual* and *A Void*, the latter novel written without the letter e), it could be argued that Georges Perec's most personal and playful work centred on list-making. He exulted in cataloguing the most trivial and quotidian of details; a list of all the food eaten in one year, or 12 ways to arrange books or, most importantly for Jean Derome, his memories of jazz musicians and popular music. This is the source-point for a series of superbly executed pastiches of the musical styles and musicians mentioned and, very properly, each track title comes with a list detailing the dedicatee, the source of the pastiche, salient facts, and the relevant text. An evocation of Sidney Bechet is particularly accurate and beguiling. 'Galop Viennois' is a very amusing track which begins with a simple piano passage which the pianist has great difficulty resolving before it moves to brass section, village marching band, and finally whistling accompanied by mouth harp. The CD also includes the meeting of a Derome-led sextet with the Belgian group White Wine Dark Grapes for a series of 17 game-structured pieces.

Derome's music for the dance **La Bête** is again wide ranging in its sources, integrating woven moments of minimalism, declamatory pained voices, a gentle waltz and, on 'Jean-Joseph', a phone ringing, voices arguing, knocking, a plangent melody, a siren and a jackhammer.

Fred Frith's **The Previous Evening** was also composed for dance companies, and it is a great pity that both it and **La Bête** are not available as videos which would, particularly in the latter case, help enliven moments of musical aridity. Frith takes this opportunity to pay homage to the New York School composers, Cage, Feldman and Brown, using the stylistic innovations of each as the stimulus for his own inventiveness. So, 'Part 1' dedicated to Cage, includes chance elements (used to 'determine' editing, structure of events, etc), brief readings from *Silence*, actual silence and snatches of Cage recordings. The solo piano piece for Feldman is a superbly sustained, event-free exposition, consisting mostly of single notes played slowly and allowed to decay. The piano dwelling on its own mortality. (*Ambiances Magnétiques, 4580 Avenue De Lorimier, Montréal, Québec, Canada H2H 2B5 / ReR, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England*)
Declan O'Driscoll

Fred Frith & Noël Akchoté, Reel (Rectangle REC K 10")
Eugene Chadbourne & Derek Bailey, Tout For Tea! (Rectangle REC L 10")
Coxhill/Minton/Akchoté, The Christmas Song EP (Rectangle REC N 7")
Xavier Garcia, Rectangles (Rectangle REC 123 7")

These releases are perhaps most notable for their formats. 10" and 7" vinyl is rarely used for improv. Work issued on these formats is naturally shorter than on CD, requiring a different approach from the musicians. It also means that the music can be more flippant or throwaway — after all 7" and 10" vinyl are the classic disposable pop/rock 'n' roll formats — and there is certainly plenty of jokey humour on display here. Akchoté, (one of the label's owners) wants to encourage the burgeoning improv/fringe-rock scene. The choice of musical combinations reflects this, both 10"s featuring rock/improv guitarist pairings that work (un)surprisingly well. Chadbourne and Bailey hit it off immediately, not only in their relaxed banter (the like of which is rarely heard on improv CDs) but in their playing, which is so well combined that it's often impossible to tell who's playing what, a sign of great improvisation if ever there was one.

Frith and Akchoté offer eight mantra-like pieces that combine melody and improvisation. Yet even here, on the most serious of these releases, there are still moments when the performers prompt laughter from the audience. These recordings are beautifully clear and it's nice to get a sense of an audience's presence. At times you can almost hear them listening.

The 7"s are less successful — Rectangle may need to tighten up quality control — yet still have charm. Garcia's plunderphonic-style pieces use

samples of the first eight Rectangle releases and often veer close to an industrial/noise/*musique concrète* style which may be a little severe for some improv fans. Having not heard the originals it's hard to know what has been done to them, but it works nonetheless. Coxhill, Minton and Akchoté do something of a comedy act on **The Christmas Song** 7" and apart from the first track (Coxhill's crack-throated rendition of 'The Christmas Song', better known in its Andy Williams version) really offer little of lasting value. Having said that, it's warming to hear musicians acting the goat in such amiable fashion. (*Rectangle, 39 Rue Ramponeau, 75020, Paris, France*)
Jim Barker

Sam Rivers, Portrait
(FMP CD 82 CD)
Martin Mayes, Unique Horn 1997
(Random Acoustics RA 021 CD)
Sam Rivers' 250-word, single sentence, rather immodest liner note for his solo recording **Portrait**, renders a review somewhat redundant because any randomly chosen excerpt ("...fleeting images illuminating shapes in dazzling displays of pyrotechnical virtuosity...") will convey with great precision the emotional and cognitive impact of this sublime CD. He begins by playing piano ("...radiating through hues of shifting mosaics...") and then, before moving to soprano, and between each change of instrument (he also plays tenor and flute) he chants and intones, summoning up the spirits ("...a reflection of intrinsic spiritual energy..."). There is something quite moving about Rivers' open, giving of himself through music ("...an anatomy of intense emotional content..."). Dagmar Gebers' photographs are another reason to own a CD which is, on several levels, magnificent.

Martin Mayes also wrote the liner note for his sort-of solo recording, guiding us through a maze of music which is far removed from the lonely notion of standing in front of an audience, as Rivers does. Mayes begins with two pieces recorded in a military castle near Turin, where he wanders through four rooms playing first the ancient hand horn and then the modern valved horn. An adapted plastic tube — spun along with performer at varying speeds — is used for '...sands with printless foot...', an idea sustained well beyond its theatrical novelty. Next is a multitracked palimpsest piece in which a Scottish woman's folk tales are layered over one another, and in turn overlaid by Mayes reciting an extract from *Romeo And Juliet*. His next imaginative leap is to foreground the sensuous sound of water dropping on various surfaces with multitracked horn. To end, he is joined by three other horn players for a beautifully realised version of Bach's suite from *Cantata #4*. All of which may make this seem terribly contrived, but the tracks integrate surprisingly well, and beyond the constructive details of each piece there is much mesmerising music. (*Random Acoustics, P.O. Box 301070, D-50780 Köln, Germany*)
Declan O'Driscoll

Jon Lloyd Sextet, Praxis
(Future Music Records FMR CD47-V0198 CD)
Another INTERface: Arthur Blythe/Wilber Morris/John Fischer, Live at the BIM
(ReEntry CD017 CD)
Daunik Lazro Quintet, Dourou
(Bleu Regard CT 1954 CD)
Saxophonist Jon Lloyd gets better every time I hear him. This current sextet recording is a lengthy part composed/part improvised suite with an unusual line-up of saxophone, trombone, violin, cello, bass and percussion. Improvisation and composition are for the most part blended seamlessly, which makes the few occasions when one or other dominate a pleasant surprise. The improvised sections are extremely disciplined; they don't waste notes, and this allows a sense of timelessness and space to infiltrate the music making. Often the music is slow and quiet but wonderfully there are even examples of that rare commodity, improvisors playing fast quietly! The music mostly operates in a more or less classical chamber music soundworld; this is in part due to the excellent playing of violinist Aleks Kolkowski and cellist Stan Adler. Percussionist Mark Sanders, for once out of the rhythmic driving seat, is unusually laid back and provides a panoply of intriguing sounds. Perhaps the most refreshing aspect is the comfortable way in which they operate within what is broadly a tonal language. Tonality is often a rarity in free improvisation and it is pleasing to

hear a group using it so constructively away from jazz influences. This is a delightfully thoughtful piece of music making from a group of highly articulate musicians.

The other discs represent a more 'traditional' free jazz approach to improvisation. Blythe, Morris and Fischer have a long pedigree as improvisors and present a selection of free improvisation and straight-ahead jazz playing. Within the formal structures of tune and chord sequence, particularly on the latter half of the disc, they are extremely constructive. However, when they move into freer areas they lose direction and appear uncomfortable without external support.

French saxophonist Daunik Lazro makes far too few appearances on record and the excellence of his playing here makes me wonder why. His witty and inventive heads allow a peerless group of musicians (including Joe McPhee and Christian Rollett) to show off their individual talents whilst maintaining a cohesive group feel. However, the real treat is the presence of two bassists, and two of the best on top form — Paul Rogers and Didier Levallet. Stereo separation and clear recording allow their individual contributions to be clearly distinguished. This is probably the best example of this kind of playing you are likely to hear this year. (*Future Music Records, 10 Baddow Road, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 0DG, England / Bleu Regard, 43 Rue De Vincennes, 93100 Montreuil, France / Re-Entry Records, 75 Warren Street, New York, NY 10007, USA*)
Bruce Coates

Mats Gustafsson, Impropositions
(Phono Suecia PSCD 99 CD)
Two Slices Of Acoustic Car, Lennart
(Blue Tower BTCDS 51 CD)
Mats Gustafsson & Barry Guy, Frogging
(Maya Recordings MCD 9702 CD)
Despite the volcanic fury which is such a feature of his playing, there is a sense listening to Mats Gustafsson play alone on **Impropositions** that silence, breath and air — fundamental essences — are as important as the raging tumult. Silence makes the roar resound and vice versa. He has a unique and intense approach to commencing a solo, that develops into a gasp, that is transformed into a startling note. From there the note is teased, extended, gnawed and fluttered, recreated in shouts, concocted into phrases and finally allowed to melt back into silence. **Impropositions** is a startling, harsh and pungent recording, a magnificent addition to the particular art of solo saxophone playing, contained in a beautiful small book which must rank as one of the most sumptuous CD packages yet devised.

In the mysteriously named Two Slices Of Acoustic Car, Gustafsson is joined by acoustic guitarist Christian Munthe for a series of five duos which, in contrast to the broad-brushed expressionist gestures of **Impropositions**, relies on the application of fragmented details. This is an approach closer to much English improvisation, a feature accentuated by Munthe's allegiance to Derek Bailey. The two work well together; they've done so for 11 years, and Gustafsson has the flexibility to realign his very personal style to accommodate a much quieter player for a recording which is intricate, hushed, pointillistic and brief.

With bassist Barry Guy, Gustafsson can once again unleash the full physicality and rigour which is a large element of both players' method. When they played a brief set in Sligo last year to launch **Frogging**, they startled those present with the uninhibited convulsion which they immediately established — a compelling presence which combined bodily gyrations with a ferocity of sound which vibrated the room and those inside it. Their duo CD has just as much impact, even though the visual element is absent. They can be delicate too, quenching their energies before the next glorious onslaught. (*Phono Suecia, Swedish Music Information Centre, Box 273 27, S-102 54 Stockholm, Sweden / Blue Tower Records, Rörstrandsgatan 25, S-113 40 Stockholm, Sweden / Maya Recordings, Carrickmourne, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland*)
Declan O'Driscoll

Paul Plimley & Barry Guy, Sensology
(Maya Recordings MCD 9701 CD)
Charles Gayle 3, Live — Berlin Movement From Future Years (FMP CD 90 CD)
IST, Consequences (Of Time And Place)
(Confront Recordings Front 04 MC)
Most music best suits certain times of day — in this case the afternoon. Perhaps at that time I have

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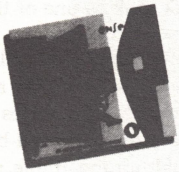

nouveautés 98

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Michel Doneda,
Daunik Lazro,
Lê Quan Ninh
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Daunik Lazro, Lê Quan Ninh, Michel Doneda.

Musique's Action CD VD09304
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Ciqure CD VD09305
Quatuor Nomad.

Tourneries CD VD09306
Dominique Regef (vielle à roue).

Berthet-Le Junter CD VD09407
Pierre Barthet et Frédéric Le Junter.

SIC CD VD09508
Pièces de Yoshihisa Taïra, Philippe Leroux, Jörg Birkenkötter, György Kurtag, Bruno Giner.

Musique's Action 2 CD VD09509
Jim O'Rourke, Jérôme Noetinger, Daniel Koskowitz, Lê Quan Ninh, Fred Le Junter, Dominique Petitgand, Massimo Simonini.

Mc Phee/Lazro/Parker CD VD09610
Joe Mc Phee, Evan Parker, Daunik Lazro.

Achiary/Carter/Holmes CD VD09611
Benat Achiary, David Holmes, Kent Carter.

La Peau des Anges CD VD09712
Annick Nozati.

Livres

Musique's Action (240 pages sur 10 ans d'activité musicale).
Musique's Action 95 (photographies de Patrick Jacques, texte de Michel Thion).

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Frank

the mental energy and concentration to digest the wealth of ideas that are tossed around by these two virtuosic players? Piano/bass duos offer specific challenges. The piano's pure tone tests the string player's intonation, and the harmonic potential of 10 fingers at play on a keyboard can cramp the bassist's freedom. Plimley's style is free-ranging; from rhapsodic improv through the balladic to an almost jazz phrasing, but at all times his tumultuous flow of ideas, voicings and his quickfire responses allow Guy the room to move around, cajole, enhance and change the direction and texture. Anything that involves Guy is worth hearing for his dazzling ability to seemingly reduce the bass' size without diminishing its compass, and his frenzied but always effective jumping from one method of articulation to another. Plimley, whether using conventional playing technique or preparing his instrument, is a fitting partner.

Charles Gayle is heralded as the new messiah of black free jazz. The flame ignited by Ayler in the 60s burns now in the likes of Peter Brötzmann and Alan Wilkinson, but Gayle is closer to the original than any of them. If this lays him open to claims of lack of originality, make no mistake, this music is for real. He is part of a great folk tradition, almost as if one man lays down the horn and another picks it up to maintain the angry, frustrated, celebratory outpouring. His trio features Vattel Cherry (bass) and Michael Wimberly (drums).

Consequences (Of Time And Place) — the time and place being the evening of April 9th 1997 at the Natural Music Club in London — hovers between nervy querulousness and the ease of chimes and leaves rustling in the wind. Imagine three sailors improvising a route over a mythic sea. The most obvious reference points are Arc or the European String Quintet, but IST (Improvising String Trio) are less dark than the former and less constrained than the latter. This is an equally intricate music, resonant with folk memories. Rhodri Davies (harp), Simon H Fell (bass) and Mark Wastell (cello) conjure a magic from a complex shuffle of plink-plonk, squeal and scrape. (*Confront Recordings, 14 B Lascotts Road, London N22 4JN*)

Gus Garside

Derek Bailey & Joëlle Léandre, No Waiting (Potlatch P198 CD)

The Giancarlo Nicolai Trio and John Tchicai (Leo Records CD LR 164)

Peter Brötzmann, Mahmoud Gania, Hamid Drake, The "WELS" Concert (Okka Disk OD12013 CD)

Lee Ranaldo, William Hooker, Jim O'Rourke, Gianni Gebbia, Clouds (Victo cd054 CD)

Bailey and Léandre (bass) make such a wonderful duo that it takes me back to one of my favourite Bailey records: the meeting with Dave Holland in 1971. **No Waiting** displays similar freshness and rapport. Bailey plays electric guitar, but with the delicacy and deliberation of a brain-surgeon. There is minimal amplification, so he sounds halfway between his normal playing-card-in-bicycle-wheel brightness, and the twanging of giant elastic bands (Bailey always was good with his pedals). The unhurried pace provides a lot of room for expression. Léandre's ESP allows for conversation on the same wavelength, coupled with nice juxtapositions: her thunderous, rattling vibrations beside Bailey's plinky plucks behind the bridge.

Recorded in 1986-87, the Nicolai Trio with Tchicai perform the kind of accomplished Eurojazz that you find in the clubs of most major capital cities. Though, perhaps not quite as good as this. Tchicai has a keen quality to his sax playing, and Nicolai is a modern, spiky, off-beat guitarist, with a sense of adventure. He shows a wide range of influences, but manages to keep his own identity. The long and only trio track 'Puppetdreams' allows him to stretch out and exhibit all his tricks — a *tour de force*. On the other tracks he meshes well with the versatile Tchicai in a series of interesting compositions. Take with Czech beer, for maximum effect.

Just to prove improv can work in any genre, the last two discs take on World music, and avant-rock. **The "WELS" Concert** features Brötzmann playing his usual arsenal of horns, Drake playing drums and tablas, and Gania singing and playing the guembri (which sounds like a colossal kalimba); it's a hollow bodied bass-like instrument, with goat intestine strings, and a camelskin covered body, which can be struck as the strings are plucked. Traditionally used by the Moroccan Gnawa people in ceremonial trance music, Gania

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plays this monotonal bass with trance-like repetition (very similar to his CD **The Trance Of Seven Colours**) until its infectious rhythm hardwires your DNA. His duo with Drake on tablas is impossible to resist. Brötzmann plays both at the low end and in the stratosphere with a non-Occidental tonality. Deeply funky and groovalistic.

Guitarist Ranaldo is here as Sonic Youth's improv interested representative. He is joined by Hooker (drums), Gebbia (saxes) and O'Rourke (organ and electronics). The first two also recite quite a lot. As a live event it must have been overwhelming, but its physicality is missed on disc. However, it is still hardcore, horror-movie noise-terror, which will remove the termites from your house. (*Potlatch, BP 205, 75921 Paris Cedex 19, France; also available from Incus Records, 14 Downs Road, London E5 8DS*)
Mark Greenaway

Eddie Prévost Trio, Touch
(Matchless Recordings MRCD34 CD)
Hyperbole Trio, Hyperbole Trio
(Slam SLAMCD226 CD)
Trevor Watts, Moiré Music Trio
(Intakt CD 039 CD)
Phil Parnell, Dear Jo
(Slam SLAMCD227 CD)
Taking silence and whispers as its thread, the Eddie Prévost trio works its musical fabric with a quiet intensity. Understatement is a rare commodity these days, and it is great to hear music with such understated thought and sensitivity. The group's saxophonist Tom Chant is a young player with a well considered angle on the soprano's internal voicings. Double bassist John Edwards is rapidly becoming one of *the* improvising bass players in this country. His touch is at once dominant and respectful, his choice of note never predictable, nudging his collaborators towards genuine adventure. Prévost plays his drums with characteristic precision and an almost cool sensibility. A fine recording with subtle attention to detail.

The Hyperbole Trio represent a wholly different improvised world. Each of the 11 tracks on the CD has a tune as a springboard for melodic improvisation. Dave Fowler is the force here, playing with a Paul Motion-like touch throughout and swinging beautifully. He and bass player Julia Doyle work well together and at times the trio evoke the vintage Charles Brackeen trio. Clive York plays tenor saxophone with an easy, relaxed feel but it is on soprano that he sounds most at home, playing with a friendly, non-astringent tone. The three musicians share the writing and most tunes have a light, conversational character.

Trevor Watts is one of the greats of British free music — there at the beginning with Paul Rutherford, Evan Parker and John Stevens. His Moiré trio features longstanding accomplice Colin McKenzie playing muscular, funk-derived electric bass against a one-man polyrhythm from Paapa J Mensah, who plays a vast array of percussion from all over the world. Watts' writing is characteristically sinuous, multi-layered and buoyant, exploring a series of Middle-Eastern modes and scales. His playing is supremely melodic at all times, possessing the trademark fruity tone of a latter-day Sonny Criss. Watts has travelled a great distance since his free improv days, and readers of this magazine may regret this; however, he plays this music so well that all but the heartless must surely forgive him.

The final CD reviewed here is a first recording from New Orleans-born pianist Phil Parnell. Fans of George Haslam's Slam label may be surprised by the appearance of this recording — the music is impeccable, swinging modern jazz and blues with not a hair out of place. Parnell plays piano as you would expect it to be played, Dave Green plays double bass with a seamless groove, and the percussion from New Orleans drummer Johnny Vidacovich and British percussionist extraordinaire Paul Clarvis, is excellent throughout.
Jon Lloyd

The London Electric Guitar Orchestra, Kneel Down Like A Saint Gorilla And Stop (2:13 003 CD)
Martin Archer, 88 Enemies
(Discus 10 CD)
Various Artists, Variations 2 (A London Compilation) (Paradigm Discs PD05 CD)
Forget rock 'n' roll as the sound of the city. That's old hat. Check this lot out! The London Electric Guitar Orchestra (aka LEGO) came out of Stoke Newington's 2:13 club; so called because it is held

in a library annexe where the clock stopped at 2:13, never to restart. As their name implies, instrumentation consists solely of seven electric guitars (OK one is a bass guitar). All seven players also contribute vocal effects. The album was largely recorded at a local infant school. As their motto is "Never Knowingly Understood", I feel the need to tread warily. However, the words 'dada' and 'Beefheart' spring immediately to mind. There are considerable differences between tracks which feature vocal effects and those which are purely instrumental. Many of the latter evoke the spirit of The Magic Band — multiple layers of guitar, unconventional chords and angular rhythms, with no obvious rockist influences — and succeed unconditionally. The tracks with vocals work well live (I know, I was there) but do not transfer so well to disc. Live, they are often combined with performance devices; for example, each player standing and rotating on a 12" record and later playing the scratched disc, which are both baffling and fascinating (in the nature of dada). Without those devices some of the effect is lost. Nonetheless, this album is more than worthwhile for the instrumental tracks alone.

Martin Archer cites the likes of Stockhausen, Boulez, Cage and Feldman as influences. His solo piano pieces (produced using sequencers, not virtuoso technique, he is keen to point out) show his debt to them, sounding like serious 20th century compositions. Yet, on tracks where Archer is less beholden to his influences, things become most interesting. A piece such as 'MF-FM' has a backing track consisting of short pulses of noise recorded from the radio (edited to give a surprisingly rhythmic effect) with acoustic piano on top. It stands up to repeated listening as well as any here. A close rival is 'A Descent Into The Maelstrom', a ponderously slow piece full of low frequency chords, which produce unresolved tension and a sense of foreboding.

Variations 2 (A London Compilation) features "lesser known artists living in London". The eight pieces (by eight different artists) hang together well, even though they feature everything from the morin khuur, a traditional Mongolian stringed instrument played by Michael Ormiston, through tenor sax (John Grieve, the only survivor from **Variations 1**) to (lots of) electronic music by Hugh Davies, Clive Graham, Rolf Gehlhaar and others. Most of the tracks have an ambient quality; the sounds produced can easily be lost amidst everyday city sounds, such as the rumble of tube trains, traffic noise, etc. Truly, this album is the sound of the city. I love it. (*2:13 Music, 44 Arbor Court, Queen Elizabeth's Walk, London N16 0QU / Discus, P.O. Box 658, Sheffield, S10 3YR, England / Paradigm Discs, Flat 9, Thane Mansions, Thane Villas, London N7 7PE*)
John Eyles

Burkhard Stangl, Ereignislose Musik — Loose Music (Random Acoustics RA 015 CD)
Urban Voices, Not Missing Drums Project (Leo Lab CD036 CD)
Satoko Fujii Orchestra, South Wind (Leo Lab CD037 CD)
These three discs all attempt in different ways to blur the line between composition and improvisation. The best and seamless is **Ereignislose Musik — Loose Music**, which is AMM-like in result, if not in process: 'Ereignislose', literally means 'eventless'. The German liner notes indicate that its intention is to loosen linear time and normal classical narrative. The 30 mins 'Concert For Trombone and 22 Instruments' has the impressive Radu Malfatti in league with the quiet, dark, dissonant elements. Sainkho Namtchylak warbles and wails on other parts, and it is not until a flute surprisingly appears on the last track that we gain respite from the omnipresent gloom. Gorgeous, impressive and phantasmagoric.

Urban Voices comprise a drumless ensemble: four wind and three string instruments, plus piano and female voices, featuring Lauren Newton and Joëlle Léandre. It has a restless quality, not exactly cut-up (like a Carl Stalling soundtrack) but with the sense of driving through a city in a slow-moving car with the window down, hearing the miscellany of sounds — through Chinatown, past the jazz clubs, street-buskers, opera house and parks. The vocals veer between Manhattan Transfer and Radio 3, with Yamatsuka Eye tomfoolery thrown in. Just when you thought you had heard everything, a finger-poppin' beat appears, only for the lights to turn green, and we pass on to a noisy restaurant. An enjoyable ride.

Following duo and solo discs, the pianist Satoko

Fujii now emerges as leader of a 15 member orchestra, playing her own compositions and those of her trumpeter husband Natsuki Tamura who also appears. Fujii previously studied classical music in Japan, but there is very little to indicate an Asian influence, apart from the exotic scale used in the beautiful 'South Wind', which is almost worth the CD on its own. Its recording locus does bear upon it, however; it sounds like a New York project (and it is!), the sort of thing you expect Tim Berne to crop up in. Not too difficult to distinguish the writing from the improv and the arrangements are one-dimensional, but all the performances are highly polished and energetic, and Stomu Takeishi plays his electric bass with wacky relish. An adventurous, conservative big band recording, if you get my drift. (*Leo Lab, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA*) **R**
Mark Greenaway

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ShortCuts

Reviewed by
Chris Blackford

Recent solo improv, plus...

Derek Bailey, *LACE* (Emanem 4013 CD); **Roger Smith**, *Unexpected Turns* (Emanem 4014 CD); **Roger Smith/Neil Metcalfe**, *S&M* (Incus CD24 CD) After some pretty uneven projects with Pat Metheny, The Ruins and, wonkiest of all, that novelty disc with Ninj, **Guitar, Drums 'n' Bass** (What next: Axemaster Bailey v Jive Bunny?), trusty Emanem come to the rescue with **LACE** — solo Derek Bailey live in LA, 1989. For someone who still seems to entertain profound doubts about the validity of solo improvising, Bailey is sure as hell good at it. To my ears, his solo work is his most compelling, the context in which he's at his most resourceful, where his important and idiosyncratic contribution to guitar music history becomes fully apparent. The two long pieces on **LACE** are captivating examples of patient, thoughtful development; passing through delightfully tangled, dissonant clusters, and shuffling bluesy 'rhythms', to periods of introspective lyricism. Who needs more crossover fripperies when you can have sensitive work like **LACE**. Even a spot of fun with the audience — DB sounding rather like John Shuttleworth. Now, there's an idea for a duo...

Sad thought — one year's worth of Derek Bailey releases probably numbers as much as Roger Smith's entire recorded output. Now 50, Smith is one of European improv's most inventive (acoustic) guitarists, yet for all his years on the London scene (including a lengthy spell with SME) he's still its most under-recorded. **Unexpected Turns** is only his second solo recording; his first, **Spanish Guitar** (1980), was released on LMC's short-lived, barely available label. The 20 home recordings on **Unexpected Turns** reveal a kind of cubist sensibility, where one glimpses a motif (pitch/texture-related) hearing it worked subtly, sometimes savagely, from various perspectives before the bigger picture emerges. A bluesy twist here, a flamenco flourish there; Smith's sparing use of idiomatic gestures, his glowing, often tantalisingly evanescent, lyricism are reminiscent of Hans Reichel. But Roger Smith deserves more opportunities like this one to showcase his innovative work. Intricate, delicate, difficult, even unexpectedly humorous, this is a gem of an album.

An odd pairing on **S&M**, like one of those Company Week encounters between musicians from radically contrasting backgrounds who stoically plug on regardless of essential 'language' differences. Roger Smith's considerable timbral/textural palette pitched against the more orthodox melodic approach of flautist Ian Metcalfe (new name to me), whose over-concern with pitch precision and legato phrasing suggest a jazz or classical background still hindering a discovery of improv's greater sonic freedoms. Consequently, it's Smith who creates all the interesting drama, all the significant shifts in mood and texture (robustly brilliant on track 9), while Metcalfe meanders above the cut and thrust. Yes, they do have their evocative moments, but I can't help wondering what sort of treat might have been in store had Smith been partnered by a more adventurous flautist like Jim Denley or Robert Dick. (*Emanem, c/o Martin Davidson, 3 Bittacy Rise, Mill Hill, NW7 2HH, England / Incus Records, 14 Downs Road, London E5 8DS*)

Kev Hopper, *Spoombung — New Music For Electric Bass* (Thoofa 1 CD) Kev Hopper's new CD is cause for celebration given the unremarkable record of the electric bass guitar (unlike the acoustic double bass) in experimental music. In fact, Hugh Hopper's (no relation, I think) **1984** (1972) was the last time I heard such interesting use of the bass guitar and, like Hugh, Kev comes from a rock background (Stump were interviewed in **Rubberneck 3**).

Kev Hopper's "spoombung" preparations (see sleevenotes) extend the bass' polyrhythmic potential, while his assistant (Rob Flint or Emma Carter) moves the preparations to gain greater textural variety and unpredictability. The higher tones have the taut and supple resonances of a tabla. Solo pieces sit comfortably alongside duos and trios, improv comfortably with electronic processing and multitracking. John Butcher's tenor sax creates a biting, almost

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Simon H. Fell has been performing improvised music for 22 years and whilst still trying to develop is probably no longer even slightly new. Other groupings include Hession/Wilkinson/Fell, Butch Morris' London Skyscraper, Something Else, Brötzmann/Wilkinson Quartet, IST, Descension, etc etc. This is not his debut recording, but is one of his current favourites...

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guitaristic, line in tension, while Ian Smith's flugelhorn navigates a lighter jazzier course, and Adam Brett's sampler deftly contorts Hopper's infectious tangly rhythms which give the album its distinctive ambience. (*Thoofa, c/o 7 Stradella Road, London SE24 9HN*)

Gino Robair, *Singular Pleasures* (Rastascan BRD023 CD); **Lê Quan Ninh**, *Ustensiles* (For 4 Ears CD822 CD); **Serge Pey/ Michel Doneda/Daunik Lazro/ Lê Quan Ninh**, *Les Diseurs de Musique* (Vand'Oeuvre 9814 CD); **Doneda/Saïtoh/Joule/ Talamonti**, *M'uoaz* (Scissors 002 CD) Gino Robair is one of the most prominent musicians on the San Francisco experimental scene, and owner of Rastascan label. This solo CD primarily focuses on the drums as surfaces suitable for "preparations" like small cymbals, motors, dog toys and marbles. His intelligence as an improvisor is manifest in the way he thoughtfully works with these objects, while allowing their often strange and amusing resonances to be themselves; tracks 2, 10 and 14 are the most striking examples. Elsewhere, especially on track 6, he opts for larger, more rhythmically defined gestures, and what sounds like a spot of nifty hand-drumming on track 8. Robair's enthusiasm for sonic exploration is always apparent.

Lê Quan Ninh arrived at improv via a classical training in percussion, and still maintains an active interest in that field; his Quatuor Hêlios percussion ensemble specialises in the work of John Cage. An improvisor on the French Nancy scene, he's made memorable recordings with Doneda, Lazro, Regef and Rogers. **Ustensiles**, his first solo improv album, underlines his emergence as one of Europe's finest improv percussionists, refreshingly uninfluenced by the muscular free jazz tradition. Ninh approaches his materials with precise authority; every stroke, sharp or sensitive, on wood, skin or metal, plays its part in his teeming, reverberant soundscapes — suggesting hail-storms, tropical cloudbursts, rippling streams, industrial machinery, and so on. An acute awareness of depth and subtle execution of layered densities, brings a breathtaking three-dimensional scope to these improvisations.

For **Les Diseurs de Musique**, Lê Quan Ninh joins regular collaborators Doneda and Lazro, plus poet Pey, who's new to me. Any recording where recited poetry plays an important role raises fundamental problems for those not fluent in the language; and my French is pretty feeble. Although there are lengthy periods of music-only, Pey's contributions carry sufficient rhythmic force to make one wonder the extent to which his meaning colours the moods of the surrounding improvising, and so arguably making the two elements inseparable. Even so, the music is strikingly non-idiomatic, frequently bursting with detailed, high register dialogue between Doneda's and Lazro's saxes, with Ninh's restless gamelan heightening the tension; even when playing quietly, they convey a palpable tension. A powerful recording even without full knowledge of the poetic content.

Doneda contributes to some more resolutely abstract improv on **M'uoaz**, on Japanese Scissors label. His opening duo with double bassist Tetsu Saïtoh sets the tone for an album of highly inventive textural exploration; Doneda reminding us that apart from being the most richly exotic sopranoist in improv, he's also one of its most expressive, while Saïtoh produces the first of four excellent hard-edged, percussive performances (shades of Barry Guy). Later, Alain Joule supplies imaginative and mostly non-rhythmic percussion, including rattles and vibes on 'Litzi', where Antonnella Talamonti's vocals inject a kind of ritual element to an extraordinary and evocative soundworld with echoes even of Noh theatre music. Improv at its most fertile and far-reaching. (*Rastascan Records, P.O. Box 3073, San Leandro, CA 94578-3073, USA / For 4 Ears Records, Steinechtweg 16, CH-4452 Itingen, Switzerland / Vand'Oeuvre Records, c/o CCAM, B.P. 126, F54504 Vandoeuvre-les-Nancy Cedex, France / Scissors, c/o Michel Doneda, Rue des Jardins, 81110 Verdalle, France*)

Ask, *Disconnected Bliss* (Discus 8 CD); **Evan Parker & Lawrence Casserley**, *Solar Wind* (Touch TO:35 CD) Ask is Martin Archer and inventive but undersung guitarist John Jasnoch, long-time collaborator; and **Disconnected Bliss** is one of the most elusive releases it's been my pleasure to ponder over this year. After a pulsating, though overlong,

neo-Krautrock tribute to Richard Pinhas/Heldon, sonic events become interestingly "disconnected"; yes, their's is the right word to describe these hard-to-describe free improvs added to in the studio, but still loose-limbed, agile and unpredictable enough to keep the listener guessing. Archer's intelligent eclectic electronics (unlike the too often arid and uninspiring academic branch) is reaping its reward in exciting works which effectively establish their own identities due to his disciplined flair (investigate **Ghost Lily Cascade** and **Electrical Shroud**, also on Discus). Moreover, his mainly pointillistic approach (though occasional breakbeats are judiciously used) offers Jasnoch's avant-rock/bluesy guitar plenty of space to weave its spidery threads. Intriguing, challenging work.

Evan Parker's association with musicians using electronics in improv goes back a long way; Hugh Davies in late 60s MIC was one of the earliest. However, I can't recall hearing one as fascinating as his duo with Lawrence Casserley. *The Sound Projector* (#3) criticised **Solar Wind** for being "very sweet and easy on the ear" — Chrissakes, somebody buy that geezer some cotton buds! In fact, it's often so abundant in microtonal detail that even your pet hound would struggle to catch every finely tweaked frequency. It's Casserley's superbly sensitive real-time processing of Parker's soprano multiphonics that makes for a seamless dialogue, where separate identities and authorship of sounds dissolve in an absorbing 'game' of multi-layered circularity (hence the Borges sleeve quote). Listening to this remarkable CD reminds me that it's high time Evan went back in the studio to develop his solo multitracking work begun on **Process And Reality** (1991). (*Discus, P.O. Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR, England / Touch, 13 Osward Road, London SW17 7SS*)

Eleanor Hovda, *Coastal Traces* (O.O. Discs OO29 CD); **Jin Hi Kim**, *Living Tones* (O.O. Discs OO24 CD) According to O.O. Discs' notes, Eleanor Hovda has been an important, if under-recognised and rarely recorded, figure on the US contemporary music scene for over 20 years. She came to my attention with 'Borealis Music' on **Outcome Inevitable** (O.O. Discs OO17). There, as on the eight pieces (1991-97) on **Coastal Traces** (the first CD entirely devoted to her music), she displays a keen interest in sustained tones and drones, doubtless influenced by LaMonte Young's work in this area. Although composed for dancers, the pieces generate sufficient atmosphere to hold the attention without the visual element. Hovda's sleevenotes refer to the shifting geology of coastlines, while her music achieves this environmental expansiveness through subtle use of a modest, yet unusual, instrumentation including oboe, oboe d'amore, bass guitar, and piano innards. Performers, Libby Van Cleve, Jack Vees, plus composer on two pieces, convey a marvellous feel for this music; their pacing and control of dynamics (soft, especially) are exemplary. Van Cleve's striking/scary shenai and oboe playing recalls Parker's and Doneda's soprano saxophones. Elsewhere, there are echoes of Sakis Papadimitriou, Organum, even Third Ear Band. Richly evocative music which repays repeat hearings.

Long tones are also a feature of Jin Hi Kim's 'Nong Rock', for komungo (zither) and string quartet, the first of her four compositions on **Living Tones**: a compelling blend of gritty, western string writing, infused with the solemn, ceremonial ambience of traditional Korean music; the komungo's plangent pizzicato underpinning, sometimes triggering, the quartet's whining pitchbend and tense, sliding and droning textures. 'Tchong' for daegum (bamboo flute) and flutes, has US flute virtuoso, Robert Dick, assisting in the creation of some truly unearthly woodwind atmospherics, detouring through a rhythmic, dance-like episode; 'Yoeum' juxtaposes a Korean court lyric with e.e. cummings text, the latter improvised upon by baritone Thomas Buckner. Finally, like 'Tchong', 'Piri Quartet' brings Korean and western woodwinds together, where three piri (ancient oboe) players call and respond to, or mesh with, Joseph Celli's subtle delivery of multiphonics on oboe and English horn; its unhurried linear movement, yet buzzing, frenzied tones, reminiscent of gagaku. Surprising, invigorating and expressive cross-cultural experimentation. (*O.O. Discs, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3452, USA*) **R**

2 Letters

Dear Chris

Since you have accused me of "factual error" in your editorial (cf. 'Vox', **Rubberneck 23**), I should perhaps clarify the brief "History" of freely improvised music which formed part of my notes for the Leo Records CDs **Synergetics** (LR 239/240).

I am not unaware of the work of Zappa, Beefheart, Soft Machine, Can and most of the other groups you mention. However to talk of these groups as if they were somehow involved in the same kind of improvisation as musicians at the heart of the scene where free improvisation was the central aesthetic priority can only produce a strange kind of retouched Kremlin photograph. I recall back then Glen Sweeney's remark "jazz is dead and we're the pall bearers" or Zappa's "jazz isn't dead it just smells funny". This is manifestly opposed to the attitude that saw total improvisation as the next necessary development after late Coltrane, Ornette and Cecil Taylor. The composer of the 'Black Page' was clearly much more attracted by the kind of music that comes from instructions to fellow musicians in ink on paper than on letting them just play. Several of your examples did not exist until the 70s — five to 10 years after the period I was talking about. The period I called second wave (c.1965-75) was just a short hand way of referring to AMM, SME, People Band, early Amalgam, Iskra 1903, AEC, MEV, MICO, Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza, Brötzmann trio, my duo with Paul Lytton and a little later Schweizer/Favre/Kowald, Schlippenbach Trio, Globe Unity, ICP, etc. If there was any obvious relationship with rock music at that time it was the exodus from our scene to what perhaps looked like those greener pastures. I think of Mani Neumeier who had played with Irène Schweizer forming Guru Guru, Jaki Liebezeit of early Schoof/Schlippenbach group and Globe Unity going to Can. Younger English modern jazz players who might have moved towards free jazz in those post-Ornette, post-Harriott Quintet times but chose instead to move that way — Graham Bond, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, Jon Hiseman and Dick Heckstall-Smith and so on.

The trend didn't start to reverse until several years later. I see the key moment as the break up of Henry Cow, with Fred Frith starting to freelance and Lindsay Cooper playing with FIG and so on. In the notes I put the date as c.1975 because I was not sure exactly when that happened. Chris Cutler now tells me it was April 1978. In the same conversation Chris also said that Henry Cow first made wholly improvised concerts during their tour of Scandinavia in 1976. Before that their playing had been a mixture of material fixed by notation and rehearsal and improvisation influenced by Sun Ra, AMM, John Coltrane and others from the earlier waves which Chris seemed to agree I had identified fairly accurately. I can't think of any prior instance where musicians with reputations established in the rock arena started to play in contexts established by free improvisors (for example the FMP Festival and the old LMC premises in Gloucester Avenue). Because of their network of European connections, their sharing of information, the founding of Recommended Records and so on they also created a whole set of new listeners and performance possibilities for improvised music. In fact the space for and relevance of the fourth (other world music traditions) and fifth (electronic technology based) waves I identified had arguably more to do with the approach, attitudes and context created by the

ex-Henry Cow players and their community than it did with earlier generations.

The other groups you cite — much as you may like them and appreciate the improvised or presumed improvised content of their work — did not have this kind of structural impact on the free scene itself and it was this scene only whose "history" I was attempting to outline in those notes. At this point in the late 90s the many forms taken by freely improvised music make the term almost useless as an indicator of how the music will sound, nevertheless history consists at least in part in understanding events in chronological sequences of action and reaction. I contend that my version of events — despite its necessary brevity — is more accurate than yours. Or perhaps your editorial was one of those deliberate mistakes you insist on including?

Best regards

Evan Parker

Dear Evan

Many thanks for your letter replying to my editorial in **Rubberneck 23**. Your clarification of the brief "History" in the Leo sleevenotes casts your original piece in a different light, although I still stand by my editorial comments.

What seems to be at the heart of your argument, as stated in your letter, is the view that unless a musician places improvisation at the centre of their work, thus making it an "aesthetic priority", they aren't worthy of inclusion in your (or even *any*?) history of the development of freely improvised music. I don't hold this view and consider it rather exclusive; others may even use the word 'elitist'.

So what that The Mothers of Invention didn't do their free improv at the FMP festival, or that King Crimson weren't part of the LMC improv scene; this doesn't mean that their use of free improvisation was invalid or intrinsically inferior to those musicians like yourself who made total improvisation the backbone of their work. There is nothing suspect or half-hearted about doing free improvisation when and where it suits, while also exploring other musical interests; for example, notated instrumentals and songs. After all, John Stevens was pretty eclectic in his musical activities (improv, jazz, jazz-rock, folk), though this doesn't diminish his reputation as a first-class, dedicated improvisor.

My reason for focusing on King Crimson (hence the Bill Bruford interview) was that their various line-ups from 1969 played free improvisation to rock audiences who weren't too knowledgeable about this area of music-making, but who gave it a chance because it was being done by their rock heroes. King Crimson didn't need to *cross over* into your (or anybody else's) improv scene to legitimise their own improv, they were already playing it (like the other groups I mention) and, in the process, challenging the expectations of huge rock audiences. And, you could buy KC's LPs, including their improvised pieces, in high street record shops alongside the mainstream pop!

While the various groups I mentioned in my editorial may be of peripheral interest to those wishing to construct a history of freely improvised music, this is no reason to narrow the scope of study; why shouldn't these so-called 'rock musicians' playing free improv to 'rock audiences' be recognised at the appropriate chronological stage — pre-1975. A small number of adventurous rock groups had picked up on the implications of Ornette's and others' 60s free jazz and the early free improv of SME, AMM, etc, plus the related improvisatory work of Stockhausen and Cardew, earlier than you suggest. Your "History" therefore presents a narrow view of the development of free improvisation, whereas mine offers a broader, more complete, picture of who was performing free improv, and in what circumstances, during the late 60s and early 70s. R

Chris Blackford

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Rubberneck 22 B-Shops; Elton Dean; Hal Rammel Hugh Davies; Third Ear Band; Jean Painlevé
Rubberneck 23 King Crimson; Joe Maneri; Max Eastley; David Jackson; Comus; Benjamin Christensen
Rubberneck 24 Annick Nozati; Gary Smith; Alva Dallas Simpson; Simon H Fell (pt 3); Robert Ashley Ladislaw Starewicz
Rubberneck 26 Pierre Favre; Rova Saxophone Quartet Johannes Bergmark; Sakis Papadimitriou; Phil Durrant; Catherine Deneuve

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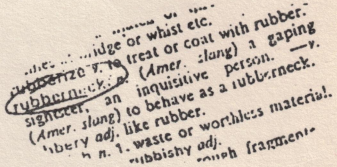

...short ideas repeated
Massage the brain...
Robert Ashley, 1979